

EXPERIENCING OLD AGE *in* ANCIENT ROME

KAREN COKAYNE



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ANCIENT ROME

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Karen Cokayne

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PREFACE

Why write on old age? Old age has never been seen as a 'glamorous' subject; indeed, when de Beauvoir (1972) said that she was working on a study of old age people generally exclaimed, 'What a dismal subject', and my own experience has not been very different. Yet, our own contemporary society has an increasingly ageing population. It has been estimated that in the United Kingdom, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the aged (usually those over 60 for women and 65 for men) comprise approximately 18 per cent of the total population, and this figure is likely to keep on rising. The ageing of society is becoming a major social issue. As the elderly tend not to be in paid employment they are seen as non-productive and a strain on resources, from pension rights to medical care. The continuing ageing of our population has led to a surge of interest in old age – over the last decade in particular – across a variety of disciplines, including those of gerontology, psychology and cultural anthropology.

The concern with old age in our contemporary society has also led to a curiosity concerning how other societies dealt with old age and the ageing process. Concentration has been mainly on medieval times and European pre-industrial societies.¹ In ancient Roman history, the Roman family has attracted much scholarship,² but the subject of old age as a whole has been somewhat neglected. With the exception of Tim Parkin, whose work on old age is imminent, most studies on old age have consisted of short papers concentrating on representations of old age in Latin literature, and some scholars have taken specific aspects of old age as subjects.³ The study of ancient societies still deserves greater attention. I would argue that, in order to have a proper understanding of a society as a whole, it is essential to have some conception of how society treated and thought about its old people. The study of old age is both a biological and a cultural event, and a society's attitude to old age, and how the old themselves felt about their ageing process, will deepen our understanding of that society and perhaps produce new perspectives on our own.

This book originated as a Ph.D. thesis submitted to the University of Reading in 2001. I am extremely grateful to my supervisors, Professor Jane

PREFACE

Gardner, Dr Helen King and Dr Ray Laurence for all their help and advice. All of them have read patiently through various drafts and my work has benefited considerably from their suggestions. They are of course not responsible for any errors which remain. I also thank the post-graduate students and staff at the University of Reading for their helpful encouragement. Finally, I thank my husband Frank, for his useful suggestions, support and for his review of the final draft.

Plate 9 is from the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen. All other plates are from photographs taken by the author. Every attempt has been made to obtain permission to reproduce copyright material. If any proper acknowledgement has not been made, I would invite the copyright holder to inform me of the oversight. Translations, unless mentioned otherwise, are from the Loeb Classical Library editions; abbreviations are from *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

INTRODUCTION

What made a Roman old?

The question of what made a Roman old is a difficult one to answer. The definition of old age was flexible and the sources are by no means clear as to what they meant by 'old'. One way to determine the onset of old age is to consider the different systems of age division: age as seen through the different stages of the life-cycle.¹ Most western cultures promote the notion that human life is comprised of a series of phases. In antiquity, both Greek and Roman literary texts show different systems of age divisions, each having distinct physical, mental and sometimes also behavioural characteristics. The ages of life were theoretical, but could have a practical application, and were used, for example, in cosmology and the regimens of health. From these age divisions, it can be seen that what was considered old varied and was often dependent on the context in which the sources were written. But from around the first century BC onwards, the age of 60 or 65 was commonly mentioned as the threshold of old age.²

Sixty (or sometimes 65) was also the age at which one could be exempted from certain legal and public obligations – such as jury service and obligatory attendance at the senate – suggesting that at this age allowances should be made for old age and physical frailty (on this, see [Chapter 5](#)). However, the threshold for allowances was much lower if the activity, or duty, depended primarily on physical vigour. Servius Tullius (578–534 BC), as cited by Gellius, divided the military into three stages. At the age of 46, soldiers were seen as '*seniores*', as from that age physical strength was thought to be on the decline; a man was thought to be no longer fit for military purposes at the age of 50, unless there was a crisis.³ These were functional measures, based primarily on biological criteria. Women's age was not usually considered in such contexts, but there are some indications that women were considered old with the onset of the menopause, which was thought to happen between the ages 40 and 50.

In daily life, however, what was seen as old was determined mainly by the biological effects of ageing, such as changes in physical appearance, weakness

of the body or mental deterioration. Wrinkles, grey hair or baldness, loss of teeth, the trembling of limbs, quavering voices, forgetfulness and loss of wit were often associated with old age; so were certain behavioural and mental characteristics.⁴ In practice, old age was therefore measured by an individual's personal appearance, physical fitness, mental agility or outlook on life. This, as I will show, applied not only to what was considered old by others but also to how the elderly viewed themselves. In everyday living, chronological age was not usually seen as a demarcation of old age. Furthermore, the Romans' knowledge of age was often imperfect and many of the uneducated would have been unaware of their correct calendar age. Age-rounding, when age was rounded up to the nearest unit of 5 or 10, was also common, especially on funerary epigraphy.⁵ It can be established that the criteria that determined the onset of old age were often vague and were commonly based on practical considerations. There was no legal retirement age, so the old tended not to be seen as a separate and distinct group in society. The old were more usually seen as individuals. Old age was, however, commonly mentioned as a specific, if indeterminate, stage in life by the elderly themselves and by others, so there was certainly an awareness of the term 'old age'.

Demography of old age

It is important to know how long people lived and how many old people there were at a given time in ancient Rome. I shall therefore look briefly at some demographical figures, such as average life expectancy and the percentage of the elderly as part of the total population. There are no statistical data available from antiquity and, traditionally, the study of ancient demography has centred on evidence from tombstone inscriptions, skeletons, the 'life table of Ulpian' (*Dig.* 35.2.68) and census returns from Egyptian households.

In each case, the data available are incomplete and of insufficient quantity. No reliable demographic interpretations can therefore be made, but it is commonly thought in modern scholarship that average life expectancy in antiquity was somewhere between 20 and 30.⁶ (As a comparison, in the UK today this is thought to be closer to 79 for females and a few years less for males.) However, for antiquity, the concept of an average life expectancy is misleading due to an extremely high infant and early childhood mortality. The low life-expectancy figure gives the impression that there would have been very few old people at Rome. Some historians have therefore made use of model life tables, based on figures supplied by comparable societies, such as those compiled by Coale and Demeny, which give figures for average life expectancy at the age of 5, 10, 15, and so on.⁷ A definition of model lifetables comes from Scheidel: 'Model lifetables describe the age structure and various demographic properties of "ideal" populations that are characterized by different but constant age-specific rates of mortality. Such models are based on

large amounts of empirical data.⁸ The model from Coale and Demeny's *Regional Model Life Tables* (1983) – Female, Level 3, West, in a stationary population – has an average life expectancy of 25, and is thought to be the most closely related to ancient Roman society.⁹ It is therefore the table most regularly used to represent Roman demographical figures. From these tables, it can be deduced that as many as one-third of all babies died before the age of one and as many as 50 per cent of children may have died before the age of ten. However, life expectancy increased for those who survived the early danger years. In this model population, those who reached the age of 10 could have expected to live an additional 37.5 years; those who reached the age of 60 could expect, on average, an additional 10.4 years; those who reached the age of 70 could expect a little over six years; those who reached the age of 75 just under five years and another 3.5 years could be expected at the age of 80. As was pointed out by Saller and Parkin, the model life tables give only probabilities for Roman society, as not enough ancient reliable empirical data are available.¹⁰

It is estimated that at Rome the proportion of elderly as a per centage of the total population was likely to have been between 6–8 per cent.¹¹ This figure is comparable to that of the United Kingdom in the nineteenth century. In 1850, 7.2 per cent of persons were aged 60 or over, and in 1900 the figure was 7.5 per cent. Today, this figure is approximately 18 per cent (Thane 2000). If we again take the Coale–Demeny Model Life Table (3, West, Female) as a guide, it can be seen that at the age of 60, 16.7 per cent out of an original cohort of 100.000 may have been alive, this figure becoming 12.1 per cent at the age of 65, 7.9 per cent at the age of 70, 4.1 per cent at the age of 75, 1.6 per cent at the age of 80, 0.04 per cent at the age of 85, 0.05 per cent at the age of 90 and a mere 0.03 per cent at the age of 95.

These figures constitute probabilities, but it can be established that although there were fewer old people as a proportion of society in ancient Rome than today, old people still represented a sizeable proportion and the total span of life appears to be not significantly different.¹²

Evaluation of the sources

There is some evidence of a tradition of philosophical writings on old age in antiquity. Few works have survived; some remain only in fragments, others are totally lost.¹³ On the whole, the available sources on the subject of old age are very diverse and scattered. My main evidence on how Roman society regarded old age comes from a large range of written sources, such as philosophical tracts, rhetorical treatises, historical and juristic writings, medico-scientific literature and fictional texts (for example, poetry, epigrams, satire and comedy). Visual imagery and inscriptions have been evaluated in conjunction with the written sources, to complete the picture.¹⁴

I have used the terms 'serious' and 'popular' to distinguish between two

diverse traditions of literary texts.¹⁵ This separation is based on the author's main purpose of writing. The term 'serious' has been used for the moralistic and philosophical texts, juristic writing, scientific and medical texts, and so on; the term 'popular' for the fictional writings. In a very general way, the moralistic and philosophical texts had a didactic purpose. They were out to inform, preach or teach and gave advice on how old people ought to behave and how people ought to age. The scientific and medical texts were concerned with the physical causes of ageing and also gave advice on healthcare and diets for the elderly. The legislative texts give insights into how the law dealt in practice with certain aspects of ageing – such as, for example, the rules for possible dispensations in old age of the *munera* every Roman citizen was expected to perform, the rights and obligations of an elderly *paterfamilias*, or the welfare of the elderly as dictated by the reciprocal virtue of *pietas*.

Fictional writings set out to show off the author's literary skills and creativity and aimed to amuse or entertain. These writings could express certain fears and preoccupations with age and ageing – usually those which were generally prevalent in society, which may or may not be the author's own – or they could, by ridiculing or making fun of old people whose conduct was unbecoming, indicate how old people were expected to behave. Both traditions were often based on a common theme, such as physical and mental infirmities, sexuality in old age and unbecoming behaviour. The distinction between the two literary traditions into 'serious' and 'popular' is therefore somewhat arbitrary, but the approach to the subject matter and purpose of writing in each is different enough to warrant the distinction.

A further limitation of the sources must be acknowledged. The literary sources were mostly written by and for the educated upper and middle classes. The authors wrote for similarly minded people, therefore little is known about old people from the lower strata of society. There is, for example, little information about old age and poverty, or about aged slaves.¹⁶ The main focus of my work on old age has therefore been the well-educated elite. Other gaps in the sources have to be mentioned; the literary writings were written by and mainly for men, therefore whatever we know about the ageing of women is through the male point of view. There is also a real dearth of the experiences of ageing by the old themselves since there is a general lack of private diaries, journals and letters.

What we have has been written for publication, with its attendant literary conceits. Written for a certain audience and for a certain purpose, these writings gave subjective views. The ancient writers commonly adhered to a literary topos, resulting in a stereotypical portrayal of old age. The stereotypes commonly depicted either a very positive or a very negative view of ageing, depending on the author's own personal attitude, or his purpose in writing. The positive or negative polarisations represented extremes; the negative portrayals of old age gave an exaggerated and dramatised view of

old age, the positive view represented the ideal. Such images do not tell how people really behaved or felt about old age, but stereotypes are not totally removed from reality and expressed ideas which were most likely to have been prevalent in society. In order to be successful, a stereotype had to strike a chord.

Use has also been made of anecdotal evidence and *exempla*. Once again, this type of evidence does not necessarily reflect how people typically behaved. Many anecdotes recalled the dramatic or the extraordinary; they often contained an element of gossip, were politically motivated or showed a personal bias, while *exempla* showed the ideal and emphasised how people ought to behave. The Romans were keen users of anecdotal stories and *exempla*. Learning by example was thought by the Romans themselves to be deeply ingrained in the Roman culture, and the giving of examples of either ideal behaviour or of narratives of how one ought not to behave can therefore provide a valid contribution to our knowledge of expected behavioural norms in Roman society.

So, in spite of the limitations of the evidence, with critical use and a constant awareness of the qualifications it is possible to give a practicable interpretation of the attitude to old age at Rome by analysing the available sources.

Period covered

I began my research by concentrating on the classical period and just beyond. The subject of old age is vast and the sources available on old age are very scattered. Roman authors, philosophers and scientific writers in particular, can be seen to have adapted and developed ideas from an earlier, Greek way of thinking – the Peripatetic school of philosophy, for instance, had a particular interest in old age. Very little of this material has come down to us, but these works were known at Rome. Cicero, for example, in his philosophical dialogue *De Senectute*, mentioned a work on old age by an Aristo of Ceos (*Sen.* 1.3), and he may have drawn upon this author. Cicero's [chapters 2](#) and [3](#) of his dialogue closely followed a conversation between Cephalus and Socrates from Plato's *Republic* (1.2.328b–5.331d). Therefore it soon became clear that concentration on the classical period was far too narrow, so I have, where I thought it was warranted, made use of earlier Greek writers. I have, for example, on a number of occasions made use of the writings of Aristotle, fourth century BC, who made various physiological and psychological observations on old age.¹⁷

In turn, many thinkers of late antiquity and early medieval times can be seen to have been influenced by authors of the classical period. So, at the other end of the scale, I have looked at attitudes to expected behaviour in old age among the Christian writers and have, on occasion, also drawn on the work of Maximianus, sixth century AD – who wrote six elegies of varied

length on old age – and on that of the seventh century AD author Isidore of Seville, whose compendium on the origins of words and customs of classical times incorporated medical writings with definitions for age terms and a division of the life-course into stages. Both writers borrowed heavily from the authors of antiquity.

Given the long period of time, in which many political, religious and social upheavals occurred, one might have expected to see major discontinuities in attitudes to old age. Attitudes to some aspects of ageing did indeed vary over time. Roman moralistic texts, for example, indicate an anxiety about a supposed change of manners and a concern with an alleged diminishing of respect for the elderly.¹⁸ However, I will show that in many aspects of ageing a distinct continuity in attitudes can be determined. Continuity occurred, for instance, in norms concerning expected behaviour in old age – for example, in attitudes to sexuality and in condemnation of extravagant or unconventional behaviour in old age. Anxieties and anguish about the biological ills of old age – from physical and mental infirmity to loss of outward appearance – can be considered a universal and natural phenomenon. How these manifestations of old age were experienced was also affected by societal attitudes, and some differences in emphasis did occur in response to prevailing current cultural and intellectual circumstances. An example of this is the concern with bodily suffering prevalent during the second century AD, the age of the Second Sophistic. But on the whole, as I shall show, an overall continuity can be demonstrated.

The division into the physical, the intellectual and the emotional

This is not meant to be an exhaustive study of old age in Rome. My aim has been to concentrate on the way the old themselves behaved and how they felt about their ageing process, and how elderly people were viewed by the rest of society – that is, by those who were not yet old themselves. Questions which were kept constantly in my mind included (1) society's expectations of their elderly, (2) their status and role in society, and (3) the expected behavioural norms in old age.

The topic of old age is a vast one and can be approached from many different perspectives and with emphasis on many different aspects and images. A conventional way of making sense of such a large subject is by dividing aspects of ageing into customary categories, such as the position of the elderly in household and family constructions, the old man in public life or in retirement, welfare for the aged, the status of the elderly, and so on. But by analysing and deconstructing the diverse and scattered texts on old age a different pattern began to emerge. From the ancient texts, it can be established that the biologically inevitable physical and mental deterioration in ageing made an enormous impact on the elderly themselves and on society

around them. It affected almost every aspect of an old person's life, from personal self-esteem to society's expectations of his or her role in life. A physically and mentally fit old man was still able to fulfil a useful function in society and had status and prestige. Only the old who were weak and decrepit – and who were therefore no longer socially useful – had a marginal status in society.

Old age is both a biological and a cultural occurrence. In medical terms, Grmek describes ageing as 'a quantitative and qualitative decline and deterioration of the organism' and, more narrowly, 'ageing is the involution of the organism as a function of duration'.¹⁹ Physiological ageing is therefore an inevitable and irreversible biological process. In ancient Rome there was an awareness of some of the major physiological infirmities which were typical of old age – failing eyesight, deafness, catarrhal and respiratory diseases, arthritis, and mental deterioration such as decline in memory and senility. Biological ageing is unavoidable, but the rate of physiological decline is not constant and the way ageing is experienced varies from person to person. Ageing is therefore a personal experience, but, as life is lived in a social and cultural context, ageing is also necessarily a cultural event.²⁰ The way an elderly person coped with the decline of the body was affected by society's attitude to the old and their physical and mental infirmities. Questions I have aimed to answer in this context include: Were the old seen as ugly and physically revolting or was there a positive side to the wrinkles, grey hair and other physical attributes of old age? What was the attitude to physical fitness and was there still a role in society for someone whose physical strength was flagging? Did society take account of an old man's accumulated experience, or was he written off as useless? What was the attitude to retirement? The answers to these questions would affect an old man's psychological make-up and the way he viewed his own personal ageing process. The way the old experienced their ageing process is therefore conditioned by a combination of biological, personal and cultural factors.

It can be seen that old age is a complex event and I have tried to make sense of this by dividing my study of old age into its three primary manifestations: (1) the physical, (2) the intellectual/mental, and (3) the emotional. These three aspects of ageing are interdependent, they interrelate and interact and some of the subjects I cover in one particular aspect might fit equally well in one of the others. I shall show how the biological decline of the body in ageing, which is basic to every human being, triggered emotional and intellectual changes that had personal, social, political and cultural consequences.

Part I of the book deals with the physical aspects of ageing. **Chapter 1** explores responses to the changes in external appearances in ageing, such as wrinkles, grey hair or baldness. How did the old themselves feel about these changes and what impact did social attitude to outward appearance have on the way the appearance of age was experienced? **Chapter 2** concentrates on

geriatric infirmities, including the physiological causes of ageing, regimens of health (which offered diets and healthcare to the aged) and the way the old themselves coped with bodily decline. How did society view the inevitable physiological decline in ageing?

Part II deals with the intellectual and mental aspects of old age. **Chapter 3** examines those texts which saw a decline of the intellect over the course of life and analyses the practical implications of mental decline, such as memory loss and senility. **Chapter 4** investigates how character developed in old age and inquires why so many negative mental characteristics emerged. **Chapter 5** considers the texts which promoted the view that experience brought good judgement and intellectual efficiency to old age. It also investigates society's expectations of their old people and retirement.

Part III explores the emotional aspects of ageing, primarily through sexual passions, conjugal love and affection, and family ties. **Chapter 6** examines society's attitude to sexuality in old age – both outside and inside marriage – and the compatibility of marriages between the old and the young. It also explores the emphasis the Romans gave to conjugal affection in old age. **Chapter 7** considers the fictional writings which ridiculed a group of marginalised old women who provided sexual pleasures. It takes into account the role Rome's male patriarchal society had assigned to women and some of the prejudices and fears Roman males had about the sexuality of women. **Chapter 8** deals with family relationships, centring on the relationship between aged parents and their adult offspring in the light of *patria potestas* and *pietas*.

Part I

PHYSICAL ASPECTS
OF OLD AGE

APPEARANCES

How do the old experience the biologically inevitable changes in personal appearance in old age – such as wrinkles, grey hair and baldness – and how far do societal attitudes influence these experiences? In analysing a variety of sources which give both positive and negative attitudes to the outwards signs of ageing, I shall show that the appearance of old age had a much wider meaning than just the physical and that it also had connections with behaviour. The old were traditionally expected to lead an old-fashioned, conservative way of life, which affected general demeanour, clothing, hairstyle, even speech.

Introduction

In antiquity, the medical and scientific texts commonly agreed that the changes in physical appearances in ageing, from wrinkles to the greying of hair and baldness, were caused by a deficiency of heat brought on by the cooling and drying of age. (The Graeco-Roman medical writers generally considered old age to be either cold and dry, or cold and wet, which will be discussed further in [Chapter 2](#).) The physician Galen, for example, who practised at Rome in the second century AD, believed that greyness in old age was the result of an undernourishment caused by a deficiency of heat. He saw greyness as a mildew, a putrefaction of some sort. He may have been influenced by Aristotle here, who made similar observations and who saw greyness as the ‘mould’ or ‘hoar-frost’ of old age.¹ Galen noted that hair was at its best in the prime of life – when a man was physically at his strongest – and becomes thinner in old age because the body became drier. Baldness, too, was thought to be caused by dryness and a deficiency of hot fluid. Galen observed that men tended to go bald on top first, as this was the driest part of the head.² Baldness through ageing was known to be an irreversible process. The first century AD physician Celsus (*Med.* 6.1) supplied a cure for baldness as a result of illness, but added that nothing could prevent men from becoming bald through old age. Like greying and hair loss, the wrinkling of the skin was also thought to be caused by dryness. Galen, for example, compared the

wrinkling of human skin in ageing to the withering of a plant. Seneca too likened the human constitution to those of plants: soft and moist when young, hard and dry in maturity.³

The medical and scientific writings showed that changes in physical appearances in old age were biologically conditioned and that some alteration of appearance in ageing was therefore inevitable. But how these changes were experienced was shaped by societal attitudes. In most contemporary western societies young people are admired for their strength and their youthful spirit, and there is much emphasis on youthful appearance; when growing older, many people spend money and effort in trying to remain youthful-looking. In ancient Rome the outward appearance of old age was often vividly depicted and two polarised attitudes towards old age can be found – among the elderly themselves and by society in general. One is very positive (old age is seen as an age of wisdom, commanding reverence), the other is very negative (in this view there is an emphasis on physiological decline, attracting scorn and derision). A middle way hardly features.⁴

Negative attitudes to the outward appearance of age

Physiognomy

Physical appearances were not very important in moralistic and philosophical writings, as the moralists were more interested in portraying character. Of interest in this context are the writings of the physiognomists, who considered both physical appearances and character.⁵ Physiognomy tried to divine the true character of man from his appearance, by comparing him to certain types of animals or races whose moral nature was believed to be known. Physiognomy originated as a branch of Greek medicine and was developed by Aristotle and the writers of the Peripatetic schools.⁶ Interest in physiognomy never completely disappeared – orators, for example, made use of the science of physiognomy in order to persuade their audience – but a renewed interest occurred in the second century AD.⁷ Of importance was the work *Scriptores Physiognomia* by the rhetorician and sophist Polemo of Laodicea, who was befriended by the emperors Trajan, Hadrian and Antoninus Pius.⁸ Especially from the late first century AD until the fourth century AD, Roman historians (for example, Suetonius, Tacitus and Plutarch) made use of physiognomy in an attempt to depict and illuminate character. Physiognomy studied facial features and expressions – the face, the forehead, eyes, hair, stature, gait and voice were all seen as important in the representation of character (the latter involved physical infirmities and will therefore be considered in the following chapter). Plutarch, for example, recalled having seen a statue of Marius, at Ravenna, and thought his expression ‘very well portrays the rough and bitter character which was ascribed to him’ (*Vit. Mar.* 2.1). A bust of an unknown Roman, once thought to be Gaius Marius, shows

an image of a balding old man with a lined and knitted brow, sagging cheeks and a serious expression (Plate 1).

At the root of the doctrine was the belief in the interdependence of body and soul. Cicero, for example, believed that actions proceeded from the mind, and he saw countenance as the image of the mind. Similarly, Seneca wrote that our soul formed our dispositions, our expressions and our gait.⁹ No direct references to old people were made in the physiognomists' writings, but propositions can be made through inference. For instance, in the physiognomic texts the most noble and courageous man was thought to be like a lion – as the lion was seen as a very brave animal, physically strong and beautiful. A courageous man was therefore expected to have a beautiful, well-constructed body and was strong, with erect carriage. He was thought to have a clear complexion, and his face was neither very smooth nor very

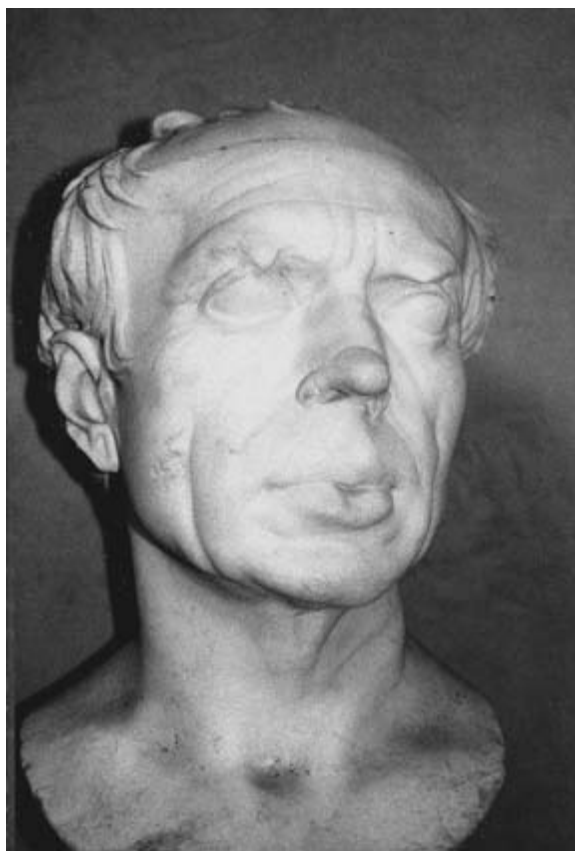


Plate 1 Old age portrait of so-called Gaius Marius. The balding head, frowning forehead, deep creases, sagging face and sombre expression embody dignity, *gravitas* and duty to the state. Musei Vaticani, Rome.

wrinkled.¹⁰ This description perfectly fitted a man in the prime of life and was the very opposite of the appearance of old age; it would therefore put an old man – who was often depicted with trembling limbs, hunched or shrunken figure and wrinkled face – in a negative light. In interpreting the physiognomists' texts, the physical appearance of an old man would be incompatible with courage; indeed, many thought lack of courage to be a characteristic of old age.¹¹ Additionally, an abundance of hair, like the mane of a lion, was associated with strength and masculinity. It was important in Roman ideology to appear manly. Masculinity was equated with virility (Aristotle noted that a man's semen was concocted from the same material as that of hair), and femininity in men was scorned and had associations with softness or sexual deviations.¹² Once again, implicitly, the balding, ageing man was at a disadvantage.

Many older men can be seen to have cared about the way they looked. It is not known whether this was for reasons of character association or simply personal vanity, but Cicero is known to have worn his toga long (longer than was fashionable) in order to hide his varicose veins.¹³ Baldness especially was disliked. Ovid, for example, wrote: 'There is nothing graceful about becoming bald. Snatched by age, our hairs fall like the autumn leaves torn by a chill wind from the trees.' Plutarch seems to put baldness as an affliction almost on a par with blindness. In an argument on the diversity of people's reactions to physical appearances, he argued that people accepted with equanimity being teased about baldness but reacted with asperity to impairment of sight.¹⁴

According to Suetonius, Julius Caesar suffered from a receding hairline, about which he was very sensitive; his enemies were said to have made the most of this, making fun of his baldness. He was said to enjoy wearing the laurel wreath on all occasions because it hid his baldness, and he combed the thin strands of hair forward from his poll. It is not known how this was viewed at the time, but the covering up of baldness by certain hairstyles was ridiculed over a century later by Seneca.¹⁵ An example of Caesar's hairstyle can be found on the obverse of a denarius minted by M. Mettius in 44 BC, when Caesar was 56 years of age, which depicted Caesar with his hair combed forward, wearing his *corona civica*, with furrowed forehead, deep lines and folds on his cheeks, chin and neck. In this example, Caesar appears to have attempted to cover up his baldness but did not seem to have minded his wrinkles, which would have given him an appearance of dignity – a subject which will be discussed below (see pp. 18–29).

Suetonius, a contemporary of Polemo, gave in his biographies many details of physical appearances which were meant to be indicative of character. Much was made of Caligula's and Domitian's baldness; both went bald prematurely (neither reached old age) and were extremely touchy about it. It is probably no coincidence that the so-called 'bad emperors' were said to suffer from premature baldness and ill-proportioned figures; an emperor's

physical appearance appears to have been an indication of the way he carried out his role.¹⁶

Tacitus mentioned baldness among a number of bodily changes Tiberius experienced in ageing. In old age, his outward appearance had, according to Tacitus, changed for the worse. We are told that Tiberius was very sensitive about his change in appearance; it was mentioned among the reasons of why Tiberius hid in Capreae in old age (*Ann.* 4.57). Tacitus described Tiberius' body as ill-proportioned, tall and round-shouldered; he had an abnormally slender figure, a head without hair, a blotchy complexion and an ulcerous face. As mentioned above, the physiognomists thought the noble man to be strong and broad, with an abundance of hair and a clear complexion.¹⁷ Tacitus saw several epochs in Tiberius' character and behaviour; noble in his younger days, changing to hypocrisy and cruelty and, in the latter part of his life, to ignominy (*Ann.* 6.51). The inference is clear: Tacitus thought Tiberius' body analogous to his character. Judgement was cast on his character and physical appearance; both were thought to have deteriorated over the course of his life.

It can therefore be established that in the science of physiognomy, which used personal appearance as a device of characterisation, the elderly came out badly. However, it must be noted that nowhere were the physiognomists against old age *per se*, but the deduction of a prejudice against the appearance of the old cannot be avoided. It is of interest that even today, images of age appear to be symbolically charged. The result of a study conducted in 1993 by Featherstone and Hepworth, on the images of ageing, showed that youth is credited not only with beauty but also with energy, moral fortitude and optimism, while old age is seen as ugly and is associated with idleness, degeneration and moral failure.¹⁸

The 'popular' writings

Derogatory remarks on the physical appearance of the old can especially be found in many of the comic/satirical writings and in epigrams. Here, wrinkles, sagging faces, baldness, grey hair, and so on, were seen as part and parcel of a general physical decrepitude. In comedy, Plautus' comedies especially, the old man most commonly insulted for his physical ugliness was the *senex amator*; a stereotypical old man, who, by falling in love with a young girl, did not behave as was expected of an older respectable parent and therefore left himself open to terms of abuse. By misbehaving, he was insulted by the young and his contemporaries alike. Numerous derogatory expressions were hurled at the old-man-in-love; for instance: 'grey-haired', 'pot-bellied', 'knock-kneed', of a 'decrepit' or 'damnable' shape, 'flabby', 'sallow complexioned', and so on.¹⁹ Unsuitable behaviour was an excuse for the pejorative remarks against the old man's physique, but for it to be successful there must have been a bias against the (alleged) ugliness of old age, a bias

which must have had universal appeal as theatre was a shared experience, enjoyed by all.

The most bitter indictment against the physical appearance of the old can be found in one of Juvenal's satires. The physique of the old was seen as hideous, even grotesque:

Look first at your face, you'll see an ugly
 And shapeless caricature of its former self; your skin
 Has become a scaly hide, you're all chapfallen, the wrinkles
 Scored down your cheeks now make you resemble nothing so much
 As some elderly female baboon in darkest Africa.
 Young men are all individuals: A will have better looks
 Or brains than B, while B will beat A on muscle
 But old men all look alike, all share the same bald pate . . .²⁰

Unsuitable behaviour was not an issue here. By describing in horrific details the miseries of a long and drawn-out old age, Juvenal aimed to show the foolhardiness of the wish for longevity. The ancients seem to have had a fascination with longevity; several texts listed people of extreme old age. These people were admired, probably because they were seen as exceptional, or as curiosities. Mythology too has tales of the wish for eternal life or immortality.²¹ Juvenal, however, showed the wish for longevity to be futile by showing that old age was not much fun. He used the satirist's exaggeration in his diatribe against the physical appearance of old age; but he went further, he deprived the old of their identity. The young were credited with individuality, but 'the old all look alike'. Juvenal deprived the old of personality and individuality of character. The old man's personal identity was obliterated and represented by his alleged ugliness and his decrepit body.

Theatre and satirical writings gave the perfect opportunity for verbal or written jibes at the old and ugly. In order to amuse their audience, both comedy and satire grossly exaggerated the physical appearance of age to the point of caricature. As Cicero wrote 'laughter has its foundation in some kind of deformity and baseness'. Laughter is a form of derision, as Quintilian put forward.²² Roman humour saw ugliness and physical deformity as a subject for laughter, and the old often qualified on both counts. The mockery in poetry and comedy of the outward appearance of old age is likely to have had its roots in reality.²³

Wrinkles and grey hair were also seen as sexually unattractive. Many examples can be found in amatory poetry and epigrams of attempts to cover up the physical ravages of old age by the use of cosmetics or other 'tricks' in order to retain a youthful appearance. Old men were said to dye or to pluck out their grey hair and cover up their baldness by wigs, all in an attempt to find love. A few examples will suffice:

When old age has bleached the aged head,
 then looks are studied. The hair is stained to disguise
 our years with dye from the nut's green husk.
 Then we task ourselves to pluck up the white hairs by the root
 and to carry home a face transformed with the old skin gone.²⁴

The amatory poets made fun of the old man looking for lost youth and still searching for love. They saw the disguising of the outward appearance of age as useless; age cannot be tricked, as, for example, was asserted by Martial:

You've dyed your hair to mimic youth,
 Laetinus. Not so long ago
 You were a swan; now you're a crow.
 You can't fool everyone. One day Proserpina, who knows the truth,
 Will rip that actor's wig away.

(3.43 trans. J. Michie, cf. 4.36)

It was thought that sexual escapades were only for the young. The old should retire gracefully from the scene of love, as will be discussed further in [Chapter 6](#). Both the objective (searching for love) and the means of attaining it (disguising outward appearance) were ridiculed in the old. The beautifying of the person was especially denounced by the moralists, pagan and Christian alike. Clement of Alexandria, second century AD, told his audience to accept the inevitable signs of ageing and look at the positive aspects of old age instead:

but though they [old men] doctor the hair cleverly, they will not escape wrinkles, nor will they elude death by tricking time. It is not dreadful to appear old, when you are not able to shut your eyes to the fact you are so. It is venerable to be old . . .²⁵

Rejuvenation was a common subject in ancient Greek mythology. These tales were well known at Rome and were frequently retold. Ovid told the tale of Medea's rejuvenation of her father-in-law Aeson and described how the elderly Aeson's good looks were restored by Medea's spells:

. . . and when Aeson drank,
 Through wound and lips, at once his hair and beard,
 White for long years, regained their raven hue;
 His wizend pallor, vanquished, fled away
 And firm new flesh his sunken wrinkles filled,
 And all his limbs were sleek and proud and strong.
 Then Aeson woke and marvelled as he saw
 His prime restored of forty years before.²⁶

The Romans retold the Greek tales of rejuvenation, but they have few rejuvenation myths of their own, which may be of some significance. Greek society put great emphasis on youth and physical beauty, as seen, for example, in Hellenic sculpture, but this emphasis on male youthful beauty was not often found in Roman culture.²⁷ Nevertheless, the texts on the negative attitude to the outward appearance of old age so far discussed have been convincing, and I believe there is little doubt that wrinkles, baldness and the grey hair of old age could be negatively charged. But the Romans also saw a more optimistic side of old age. Wrinkles and grey hair, the symbols of age, could also be seen as a definite asset, as will be discussed in the next section.

Positive attitudes to the outward appearance of age

Old-age portraiture and moralistic texts

A more positive message can be gained through the veristic old-age portrait busts which appeared during the first century BC. (The term ‘veristic’ is used by modern scholars because of its heightened realism, a ruthless adherence to realistic features, wrinkles, folds of loose, flabby skin, blemishes: all the evidence of extreme old age.) Here, the wrinkled faces, sunken cheeks (suggesting toothlessness) and balding heads of the old are thought to represent the *dignitas* and *gravitas* of age (Plate 2). Importantly, these portraits reveal how these old people wanted to be seen, and the depiction and characterisation of old age is deliberate. Some old people, therefore, had a high self-esteem, in spite of their physical deterioration. Portraits can reveal much about the ways in which people of certain times, place and social status thought about themselves and how they wished to be perceived by their contemporaries and by posterity.²⁸ Style, form and facial expression all evoke emotional responses from the viewer and can be a valuable source for understanding prevailing attitudes in society. It must be noted, however, that style and form are also dependent on fashions and political motifs and tend to be of a cyclical nature.

Much has been written by art historians on the possible origin of the so-called veristic portraits without solving the problem.²⁹ It is quite likely that, stylistically, the artists drew upon a wide variety of sources, but in this context it is important to look at the ideology behind the veristic old-age portrait. Here, a possible connection can be made with the use of the *imagines*, the practice of wearing masks of one’s ancestors in the funeral procession of Roman *nobiles* (see Plate 3 for an example of an old Roman holding the *imagines* of his ancestors). Literary sources tell us about the use of these masks, which had a close resemblance to the deceased and were, possibly, death masks made from wax.³⁰ Polybius infers that the masks had a didactic purpose and represented the noble deeds performed by the man who was buried. These masks were meant to be an incentive to the young. Indeed,



Plate 2 Portrait of an unknown old man from the Republican era. The depiction of age – exemplified by a wrinkled, deeply lined face and a stern, serious expression – is symbolic of good judgement, wisdom and belief in traditional virtues. Musei Vaticani, Rome.



Plate 3 Portrait of a Roman Republican holding two portrait busts of ancestors. The use of ancestor imagery had a didactic purpose, since the wrinkled faces showing experience and time-induced strength of character were meant to inspire the young. Palazzo Barberini, Rome.

according to Sallust, two heroes of the Hannibalic wars, Fabius and Scipio, declared themselves inspired to feats of virtue by gazing upon the *maiorum imagines*.³¹ The use of these masks, which had associations with old traditional Roman values, endorses the ideology behind veristic portraits. Roman moralistic writers, from the late Republic onwards, often lamented what they saw as the loss of traditional Roman values of the past, the *mos maiorum*.

This tradition promoted respect for the *dignitas* and *auctoritas* of old age; the old were credited with wisdom, gained through experience. At a time when the Republic was in turmoil, it is perhaps not surprising that there was a nostalgia for old-fashioned traditions, and these first century BC old-age portraits can be seen as harking back to allegedly lost values.

It is notable that the majority of the old men appear solemn, which was indicative of the *gravitas* of age. Partying, fun and light-heartedness belonged to youths; as Seneca phrased it in *Phaedr.* (451–454): ‘God has portioned out its proper duties to each time of life and has led this span of ours through its own stages; joy befits the young, a serious face the old.’ I shall refer again and again to the Roman belief that each age had its own constitution and its own behaviour pattern. It was believed that the old should behave in a conservative way and show moderation and self-control. The old should always be an example to the young and should behave with dignity in order to be good role models. Valerius Maximus, for instance, in his introduction to *Facto et Dicto Memorabilia*, claimed that morality by example was ingrained in Roman society, and Syrus declared: ‘When seniors blunder, juniors learn but ill.’³²

Worthy and dignified behaviour was therefore assumed in old age, and the old-age portraits reflected these expected behavioural norms. These portraits give moral judgements; as mentioned above, facial expression was seen as indicative of character, the stern and serious-looking wrinkled faces being a visual expression of what was thought to be a traditional Roman reality. These old men elected to have themselves portrayed as aged, and age was intentionally chosen to express certain positive beliefs. The wrinkles and the solemn facial expressions were intended to elicit a response from the spectator.³³ The exaggerated wrinkles and folds were used as a topography of virtue. They were suggestive of years of experience and time-induced strength of character, of hard work and service to the state – ideals of age which can also be found in contemporary literary sources.³⁴ It is clear that these old men wanted to be seen as sober living men – and were proud of it. The portrait busts are the embodiment of the ideal old statesman. Cato was commonly seen as an exemplar of traditional, old-fashioned customs and was admired by Cicero, who used him, then aged 84, as the mouthpiece of his defence of old age, *De Senectute*. Indeed, Cicero had his own portrait made in the veristic style (Plate 4). These portraits were reminiscent of the ‘*senes*’, the old men the forefathers had appointed to be the highest deliberative body, the senate, whose mental qualities – as Cicero reminded the young Laelius and Scipio, his interlocutors in *De Senectute* – were characterised by reflection, reason and judgement.³⁵

Although it was realised that some people went grey prematurely, wrinkles and grey hair were seen as markers of old age and were often used as a metaphor. Men who started to go grey at the temples felt this was the transition into old age, a signal that they had to start behaving with dignity and

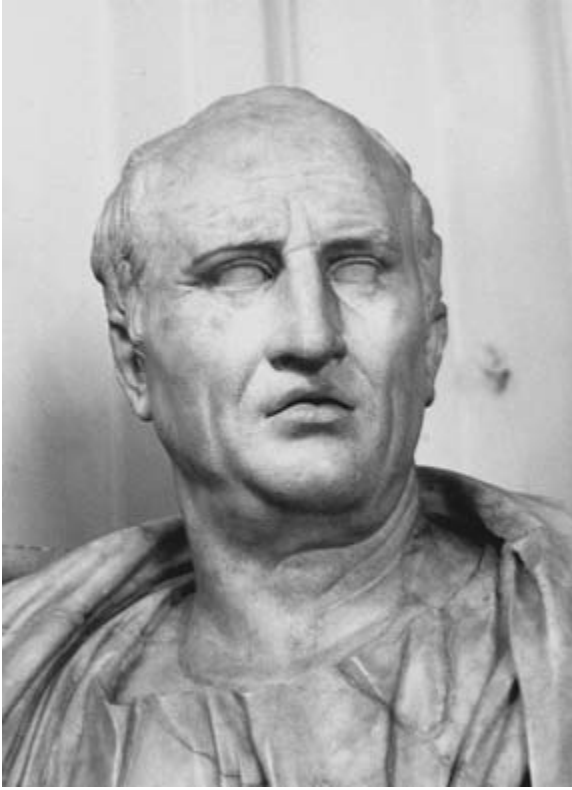


Plate 4 Veristic portrait bust of Cicero, first century BC. The realism had moral significance and symbolises conformity to old traditional Roman values. Musei Capitolini, Rome.

cast off all frivolities.³⁶ The moralistic texts intimated that wrinkles and a hoary head, as symbols of age, could expect authority and reverence (although these texts do not reveal to what extent respect was actually accorded to the old). Plutarch wrote: 'hoary head and wrinkles . . . appear as witness to man's experience . . . Nature puts grey hair upon it [the head] as an honourable symbol of the high density of leadership.'³⁷ But it was made clear that veneration for the grey hair of age had to be earned by right behaviour and right attitude. Examples can be found both in the serious and the more popular sources. Cicero, for instance, argued: 'wrinkles and grey hair cannot suddenly seize upon influence; but when the preceding part of life has been nobly spent, old age gathers the fruits of influence at last'. From the more popular text, the epigrammist Philo: 'Grey hairs are more venerable together with good sense, for when they are not accompanied by sense, they are rather a reproach to advanced age.'³⁸

The veristic old-age portraits of upper-class men aimed to depict this ‘good sense’. It must, however, be noted that this perception was also used for political purposes. Initially, these portraits were for private use, for the glory and perpetuation of their *gens*. Later, this type of portrait also appeared on coinage, and the portraits were used for public display and for the self-aggrandisement and prestige of those portrayed. Age and experience gave a person status. The old and archaic feel of the veristic portraits suited the political climate of the late Republic. The political aspect is underlined by a change of style under the regime of Augustus, who, when he emerged as the sole ruler of Rome in 31 BC, emphasised a new regime with a new portrait style. Having used the more flamboyant Hellenistic style in his rise to power, he now favoured the classical style with its idealised, calm and serene features, which the Augustan ideology equated with peace and prosperity, a contrast to the grim hopelessness of the previous age. Augustus’ portraits hardly aged, even when he was an old man. His portrait as *pontifex maximus* shows him as a serene, youthful-looking man, barely aged, when he must have been in his fifties. Suetonius described Augustus, in old age, with few and decayed teeth which would have given him a sunken appearance, but no known portraits reflect this depiction. The elite soon followed this idealistic type of portrait style.

A revival of the veristic portrait style occurred under the Flavians, emphasising both the cyclical and the political nature of portrait art. In the aftermath of Nero, the classicism of the Julio-Claudians had negative connotations and the Flavians returned to Republican sobriety and restrained emotions. After the Flavians, a certain flamboyance returned. Under Hadrian, bearded portraits became fashionable, reminiscent of the ancient Greek philosophers; beards here served as an idealised sign of mature wisdom. The Romans were not normally bearded, a beard was only worn by the young and was shaved off by the time a youth reached the age of around 25. Beards, therefore, were consciously chosen to represent a value judgement (this portrait type will be discussed further in [Chapter 5](#)). Later, a return to realism can be noted, as for example in a portrait of G. Messius Quintus Decius, who was emperor from AD 249–251 and who took on the additional surname of Trajan ([Plate 5](#)). Of interest are the aspirations of those who commissioned the portrait. This expressive portrait of Decius reveals that he saw himself as a staunch upholder of old traditional Roman values. His wrinkles and worried expression suggest a preoccupation with the political and military problems of his time; he shows himself as a man who took his duties to the state seriously. Women, too, took to the veristic style of portraiture. An example can be found in [Plate 6](#). This old woman looks the epitome of the ideal Roman matron, as described in [Chapter 7](#).

So far our evidence has come from the Roman elite. It is therefore of interest to learn that from the late first century BC to the second century AD, some ordinary men and women, the *libertini*, also adhered to a more realistic



Plate 5 Veristic portrait bust of Gaius Messius Quintus Decius, emperor AD 249–251. Musei Capitolini, Rome.

style for their funerary portraits – although this happened after the fashion had been adopted by the upper classes (see [Plate 7](#)).³⁹ The Roman freedmen, who did not have legitimate ancestors, used their funerary monuments in order to show off their new legitimacy and status, emphasising the Roman values and the conservative character of traditional Rome, as the upper classes had done in the late Republic. These portraits were often of family groups, sometimes showing two generations. The mature and elderly men are depicted as heads of households. The *libertini* followed Roman traditional values. Kleiner shows how they dressed conservatively: their style of toga, represented by length, fullness and fall of the sling (*sinus*), was old-fashioned for the time (see, for example, [Plate 14](#), where the younger man's toga is fuller over the chest than the toga of the older man).⁴⁰ These were ordinary working people; attributes of their trade or profession are sometimes carved at their side. These people were proudly showing traditional Roman family values and respect for hard work, custom and age.



Plate 6 Portrait of an unknown old Roman woman, epitomising the ideal Roman matron. This woman appears comfortable with her age and shows no personal vanity. Her face is lined, her dress and hairstyle plain, simple and unadorned. Musei Capitolini, Rome.

The portraits of women are a little more idealised, which is probably intentional. We cannot be sure if this was because women were intrinsically vainer, but it has to be noted that women were usually at least ten years younger than their husbands. Like their husbands, the dress of the old women was old-fashioned, as was suited to their age. Kleiner indicates that their hairstyle was often of Republican days; aristocratic fashions and hairstyles were often adopted belatedly and retained much longer.⁴¹ The elderly freedwomen lagged behind the upper-class women in the fashion stakes by maintaining a conservative non-idealised image. This is in contrast to the younger generation, whose dress and hairstyle are much more contemporary (Plates 8, 9). The faces of the younger men and women also portrayed less character than that of the time-induced characteristics of the older generation. It is of interest that this is the exact opposite of Juvenal's observation



Plate 7 Portrait of the freedman C. Rupilius and his wife, late first century BC. The depiction of old age, their serious expressions and lined faces show that they share the old-fashioned and conservative values of the Roman upper classes. It is of note that the signs of old age are accentuated in both figures, which may mean that husband and wife were of a similar age. Musei Vaticani, Rome.



Plate 8 Early Augustan funerary relief of three freedmen. That the old were more conservative than the young can be seen in the way their hair is styled. Only the younger man on the left is supporting a contemporary Augustan hairstyle. The older man on the right – with wrinkled face, sunken temples and cheeks – represents the father figure. Musei Capitolini, Rome.



Plate 9 Family portrait, first century AD, showing two generations. The young man in the middle (in military uniform) wears a current mid-Augustan hairstyle. The older woman on the right wears the so-called *nodus*, a hairstyle no longer fashionable in Augustan court circles, while the younger woman on the left displays a more contemporary coiffure. The signs of ageing in the old man are more heavily accentuated than in his wife, perhaps representing a difference in the ages of the couple. NY Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

(discussed on p. 16), who attributed the young with personality, while this was obliterated in old age. The faces of the younger generation bear more resemblance to the classical portrait style which was current among the upper classes. Even in the style of portraiture, therefore, the younger generation was more fashionable.

The portraits of the *libertini* depicted real people – men and women who consciously decided how they wanted to be viewed by society. The older generation give the impression of old-fashioned, unpretentious people, with their sobriety and earnestness of expression. They depicted the same cultural ideology as their earlier aristocratic counterparts; it is important, however, to note that both types of old-age portraits may have represented an ideology rather than reality. The *libertini* appear to be proud of their newly found Romanness and look contented to have grown old as part of a family (as slaves they could not marry), which would have given them greater emotional and financial security in old age.

These portraits are of particular interest, as we have little or no textual evidence from the ordinary people themselves; they show that the middle to lower classes ascribed to the same ideology as their upper-class counterparts. The funeral portraits of the *libertini*, and the earlier old-age veristic portraits of the upper classes, were representative of a positive attitude to old age: these people were proud of the way they looked, wrinkles and all. Representation of age here is on a par with many of the philosophical and moralistic writings, which put more emphasis on character than physical appearance (texts which will be discussed in [Chapter 5](#)). These portraits do not show any of the negative social drawbacks connected with the alleged ugliness of the old that were implicit in the physiognomic texts and, more explicitly, in comic and satiric writings, thus suggesting that Roman society adopted a somewhat ambiguous attitude towards the outward appearance of old age.

Conservatism

As has been shown, the old-age portraits of the upper classes and the *libertini* emphasised that society expected the old to lead an old-fashioned, conservative and sober lifestyle, as was thought to be suited to their stage in life. Flamboyancy should belong only to youth. This applied in almost every aspect of life, from behaviour and general demeanour to clothing, hairstyle and speech. On the latter, Quintilian wrote:

... a full haughty, bold and florid style would be less becoming to an old man than a restrained, mild and precise style ...⁴²

It was believed that a man's character and way of life were revealed by his way of speaking. Cicero quoted a saying which he attributed to Socrates: 'as a

man's speech, so his way of life'.⁴³ Speech, therefore (choice of expression, style and delivery), had to fit the moral character of the speaker, and the speech of an older orator ought to be different from that of a younger one. Quintilian, probably influenced by Cicero in this matter, believed that the 'Asiatic' style – which was ornate, flowery and flamboyant and was often delivered in a wild singing manner with lively hand movements – was suited only to the young, the simple, spare and sober 'Attic' style – delivered with propriety and not much movement – being more suited to the old. The young, Quintilian argued, should not even try the Attic style, as it would suggest the affection of severity (*severitas*) and authority of age (*senilis auctoritas*). To do so could therefore be seen as pretentious. It must, however, be noted that rhetorical styles are also dependent on fashions. In the late Republic, for example, the Asiatic style was seen as modern and fashionable and was adopted by the young (for example Calvus and Scipio).⁴⁴

Cicero seems to have made a conscious effort to tone down his flowery style on his return from a visit to Athens and Rhodes. He appears to have aspired early to the dignity and *gravitas* of age, as he was then only 29 years of age. His political ambitions were such that he no longer wanted to be associated with youthful excesses ('*iuvēnili quadam dicendi imōunitate et licentia*', *Brut.* 91.316). He later wrote: 'these [florid] styles are better suited to youth; in older men they lack weight and dignity'.⁴⁵ His natural inclination was for more flamboyant language – and some say he never quite achieved a pure and simple style – but it is of importance that he felt the need to temper his purple language in order to be taken more seriously.⁴⁶ Cicero criticised Hortensius for still using the flowery Asiatic style when older, and alleged that the older Philippus listened to Hortensius with a derisive smile, even showing anger and impatience (Cicero was about 60 years old when he wrote these lines and Hortensius was about eight years older, but the incident could have happened earlier).⁴⁷ Cicero thought Hortensius' language lacked the weight and authority his age and official honours demanded of him. He implied that Hortensius did not live up to the conduct expected of him. In modern terms, 'he let down the side of old age'.

Cicero admired the old Appius Claudius whose old-fashioned language was, according to Cicero, like his lifestyle, stern and authoritative.⁴⁸ Old-fashionedness, sternness, authority: these were the very ideals the morally charged veristic old-age portraits aimed to depict, and it is of interest that these values surfaced in so many different aspects of life. Language was seen as an expression of personality and lifestyle, therefore value judgement was passed on style, tone and presentation. In order to be successful in public life and to earn the respect associated with age, an older man had to be seen to conform to societal norms and use a simple and controlled language, which was thought to be appropriate to his age.

The change from the extravagance of youth to the dignity of old age was, in most cases, considered to be a natural process; each stage in life was

thought to have its own condition with its own characteristics, and language was part of this. As noted by Maltby, Terence used conservative language and old-fashioned expressions for his old men (1979: 136–147). This old-fashioned mode of expression may have mirrored the real world. According to a study by Featherstone and Hepworth, in today's society too it is found that the elderly adopt an elderly vocabulary and focus on certain topics because they think this is what is expected of them (1993: 308).

At Rome, clothes too came under scrutiny. As shown in [Plates 8 and 9](#), the portraiture of the *libertini* showed that the elderly freedmen and freedwomen were old-fashioned in their choice of dress and that this is as it should be. The wearing of fancy, brightly coloured or transparent clothes was appropriate only to the young. To wear this type of clothing when one was mature or old was seen as totally unsuited to one's age. It is of interest that this is also the case in contemporary society. Compare, for example, the pejorative expression 'mutton dressed as lamb' and Jenny Joseph's humorous poem 'Warning', in which she depicts a woman who intends to rebel and grow old disgracefully: 'When I am an old woman I shall wear purple . . .' For ancient Rome, we can once again turn to Quintilian for evidence:

It is the same with their style [in oratory] as with their clothes; purple and scarlet raiment goes ill with grey hairs. In the young however, we can endure a rich and even, perhaps, a risky style and apparel.⁴⁹

Hortensius, who, as shown above, was attacked for his flowery language, was also well known for his foppishness in dressing and mannerism, which earned him the nick name Dionysia (the name of a notorious dancing girl), as we are told by Gellius (*NA* 1.5.2–3). Hortensius' age was not mentioned in this context, but the Romans were unlikely to have criticised him if he had been in his youth.

According to Dio, Caesar was attacked for bestowing attention on his appearance 'well past his youth' (43.43.1). He was said to have worn loose clothing and a tunic with long fringed sleeves, and fancy footwear of a reddish shade which was seen as effeminate. In the same passage, Dio wrote that Caesar still thought himself young looking (he was aged about 55) and claimed he received from Venus, his ancestor, the bloom of youth. (It is of note that the gods were eternally young and never aged.) This image of Caesar is in sharp contrast to some of his distinctly veristic portraits on coinage or portrait busts, where he clearly looked old, giving him an air of dignity. Representations of reality and the ideal, which Caesar pursued for political reasons, were not always the same.

Conclusions

From a variety of texts and from visual imagery it can be established that the old were expected to act with dignity and be conservative in demeanour. Societal expectation of a sober life in old age was very pervasive and was reflected in numerous facets of life, even in the way one spoke and in the way one dressed. The old had to be a good role model for the young, as it was thought that the young learned by example. This had an impact on society's attitudes to the outward manifestations of old age. If an old man conformed to the moderate and conservative demeanour that was expected at this stage of life, the wrinkles and grey hair of old age were seen as a positive advantage. As can be learned from the moralistic writings and from the so-called 'old-age' portraits, grey hair (or balding heads) and wrinkles were used symbolically. They were a metaphor for good sense, hard work and dignified behaviour; they were a signal of authority and wisdom, and the hoary head could expect respect.

But the outward appearance of old age also had negative connotations, especially in the more popular texts. Old men were seen as ugly, even repellent – especially (but not only) when the appearance of age was bound up with unsuitable behaviour. It is of interest that the texts of the physiognomists were averse to the physique of old age without mentioning the old specifically. Fictional images and realities often interrelate and some prejudice against the physical appearance of the old is likely to have existed in real life. We have few personal expressions from real old men on the regret of lost looks, and the alleged sensitivity of real old men came from commentators and was also implied by the attempt to 'cover up' the signs of ageing, which was used as a topos in some literary genres. From evidence in contemporary society, it can be learned that the old resent derogatory stereotypical expressions to describe their outward appearance. A letter to the *Observer*, 7 July 1991, declared: "“Wrinkly”, when used to designate an old person, is not amusing – it is especially semantically incorrect, rude and unkind. After all we old people do not describe our teenage friends as “the spotties” . . ."⁵⁰

But, I would argue, the appearance of old age in ancient Rome was generally not as negatively charged as in some other societies, ancient or modern, as there is also evidence that the old were seen as valued and respected members of society. The existence of the old-age portraits showed that the positive attitude to wrinkles was not merely a theoretical or idealistic conviction put forward by moralists. Real people, at least at certain times, felt comfortable and positive with their condition. They can even be seen to have been proud of the wrinkles of age and choose to have these depicted in an often exaggerated way. Cicero did not even mention fear of loss of physical attractiveness in his list of 'charges against old age' in *De Senectute*. In contrast, in contemporary society, a study on what people feared about old age showed loss of physical beauty and attractiveness as a key consideration.⁵¹

APPEARANCES

Little is known about the respectable upper-class matrons' attitude to loss of physical attractiveness, although their portraiture suggests this was not *too* dissimilar to that of Roman males. That wrinkles were seen as disastrous for some groups of women, the mistresses and the prostitutes (usually from the lower strata of society), will be discussed in [Chapter 7](#).

OLD AGE

An ancient disease?

How did ageing cause physical decline? Why was old age seen by some as a disease? Which illnesses were thought to be typical of old age? What could an ageing man (or woman) do in order to make the physical decline of old age more bearable? In order to answer these questions I shall examine the medical texts on the causes of ageing and the literature of regimen, which offered diets and healthcare for the aged. I shall also explore the way 'real' (named) old people coped with the physical decline in ageing, taking into consideration if and how this would have been influenced by society's attitude to geriatric infirmities. Did attitudes to old age vary over the ages? Finally, did the stereotypical images and generalities of the decrepitude of old age – as depicted in fictional literary sources – match up to reality and the experience of real old men?

The medical writers' view on ageing

Much of the medical knowledge of the ancients came from works attributed to Hippocrates (fifth century BC onwards, consisting of a large corpus of writings which bear the name of Hippocrates, but were not all by the same person), Aristotle (fourth century BC), Galen (second century AD); also Celsus (first century AD), Soranus (first to second century AD) and Oribasius (fourth century AD). The Roman medical writers subscribed to the theory of ageing cultivated by the Hippocratic corpus, some texts of which formulated the first medical hypothesis about the causes of ageing through the theory of the four humours. It was thought that the body was controlled by four substances, or humours – blood, black bile, yellow bile and phlegm – which together were responsible for health and pain.¹ The four humours corresponded to the four cosmic elements (fire, air, water and earth), which displayed certain qualities (heat, cold, moisture and dryness).² The right combination of the four humours meant health; a defect, illness. Later, natural scientists and physicians added to the humoral doctrine, but the basic principle lasted up to the eighteenth century.³ The theory of the four humours had an effect on practical medicine; it was thought that response to

foods and drugs varied with the humours, the seasons and the ages of men, and the treatments were varied accordingly.

In the Hippocratic corpus, ageing was explained by a cooling process which happened over the course of life. It was believed that each individual received at birth a certain quantity of heat, or vital spirit, which slowly diminished. Although the vital source of heat could be replenished – by food, drink and breathing – it could never be restored completely. As heat was seen as essential to life, a weakening – or ageing – occurred with the cooling. Ageing was therefore seen as a gradual process of degeneration caused by the cooling and drying of vital heat, which created an imbalance of the body's fundamental qualities.⁴ The consumption of heat and the initial supply was thought to vary, so each person would age at a different rate. The improper mixture of the humours was seen as the basic factor in the majority of diseases. By implication, old age would therefore be classified as an illness, and indeed a number of people in antiquity considered old age to be a chronic, incurable and progressive disease, from Aristotle (fourth century BC), who saw old age as a natural disease, to Seneca (first century AD), who wrote: 'For old age is a disease which we cannot cure.'⁵ The belief that old age was a disease must therefore have persisted for a considerable time (and is likely to have had repercussions on society's view of old age and the aged), but by the second century AD the physician Galen moderated this view somewhat. He saw senescence not as a disease but as a 'midway stage between health and illness', or 'health with a disposition'; he saw disease as contrary to nature, while old age was seen as a natural condition.⁶

Aristotle added to some of the Hippocratic principles. He saw the heart as the source of innate heat and blood as the ultimate nutrient. Blood vessels transported the heat throughout the body and the organs and limbs were animated by it. Old age was thought to have a lack of the blood which feeds the heart, so the life-giving internal fire would starve, resulting in a weakening or ageing.⁷ Aristotle also contributed a defect in the breathing process to the theory of ageing. He believed that in old age most of the heat had been breathed away (heat is consumed by itself), and as lungs dry over a length of time they can no longer cool. It was therefore thought that the decay of old age originated from within, but Aristotle also noted that destruction could come from outside, for example through disease. As the old were weak, they were particularly vulnerable if they became ill; as Aristotle put it 'the old had little heat left and as a small flame is easily extinguished, even small ailments could result in death'.⁸

The physician Galen, second century AD, gave more attention to the causes and nature of ageing than most physicians or natural scientists before him. Galen came originally from Pergamon, but later practised at Rome where he was the court physician of Marcus Aurelius. He lived in a period when many of the upper-class intellectuals showed a great preoccupation with the body and the self, as will be further discussed below. Galen combined observations

from his own medical practice with theoretical knowledge, based in part on doctrines from Plato, the Hippocratic corpus and Aristotle. He had a huge following. Galen saw old age as a specific stage of the life-course, with its own physical constitution and therefore its own needs. In his work on the preservation of health, *De Sanitate Tuenda*, he devoted several chapters to old age. Here and elsewhere in his many writings he covered several aspects of ageing, including the causes and nature of old age, the illnesses to which the aged were prone and a regimen of health suited to the old.

In his *Sanitate Tuenda*, Galen explained the system of ageing from the point of conception. He believed that blood and semen – hot and moist substances – were the sources of generation, requiring a drying element (heat, and to some extent earth) to produce tissue. He conceived that innate vital heat began to dry these substances, producing an embryo. After birth, the drying process continued, the body grew larger, drier and stronger until it reached full strength and development somewhere in the middle of human life. Then all growth ceases, as a man's innate heat gradually diminishes:

But in ensuing time, as all the organs become even drier, not only are their functions performed less well but their vitality becomes more feeble and restricted. And drying more, the creature becomes not only thinner but also wrinkled, and the limbs weak and unsteady in their movements. This condition is called old age.⁹

Galen therefore considered ageing to be a cooling and drying process of innate heat (*Mixtures* 2.582). Senescence was seen by Galen as a natural condition; everybody was programmed to grow old. As mentioned above, he therefore did not see old age as a true disease. Like the authors in the Hippocratic corpus, Galen too noted (in *San. Tuenda* 5.9) that not everybody grows old at the same rate:

This is why we grow old, some at one age, others at another, sooner or later, because we either are from the beginning by nature excessively dry, or become so either from circumstances, or diet, or disease, or worry, or some such cause. For that which all men commonly call old age is the dry and cold constitution of the body resulting from many years of life.

Galen added the diminution of moisture to the ageing process, but it was agreed by all that ageing was caused by a gradual loss of innate heat, which in turn caused a derangement of the humoral equilibrium.¹⁰

Various age groups were seen to be prone to specific diseases. The humoral doctrine believed old age to be dominated by phlegm. From observation it could be seen that the old man's body exuded large quantities of wet excretions. Galen noted watery eyes, mucus in the nose, large amounts of saliva in

the mouth, phlegm in the stomach and lungs (which was expelled by spitting), and mucous joints. Old age was therefore seen by some physicians as cold and wet. Galen opposed this view and had his own interpretation for the seemingly contradictory notion of old age as cold and wet and ageing as a cooling and drying process, by explaining that the bodies of old men are only wet from the outside, but that the solid, inner part of the body – such as bone, ligaments, nerves, arteries, veins, membranes and casings of all organs, flesh – was dry. There was no contradiction or dispute about the coldness of old age, a belief obtained by a combination of theoretical knowledge and observation and touch. Galen observed that the old were cold to the touch; he thought this was because they had lost nearly all the blood in their bodies (*Mixtures* 2.582). The elderly were therefore subject to the cold diseases, such as paralysis, numbness, tremor, convulsion, mucus, sore throats.

Listings of diseases which were observed to be common among the old can be found in a number of texts, such those found in the Hippocratic corpus and in those of Celsus, Galen and the elder Pliny.¹¹ These comprise merely of a catalogue of symptoms. Celsus (whose catalogue of diseases was close to that of Hippocrates) listed urinary and respiratory problems, catarrh, kidney problems and articulation, insomnia and paralysis, ear and eye aches, bowel pains, dysentery and colic. Loss of teeth and bad eyesight were also found to be common, but this was considered an external problem, not affecting health in general. A remark in the *Digest* suggests that if the lack of teeth was considered a sign of disease no old man would be considered healthy.¹²

Only a few specific remedies were offered for the diseases of old age. Celsus recommended the drinking of undiluted wine and the bathing in warm water. He also thought the eyes of the old should be bathed and smeared with honey or oil (*Med.* 1.3.32–33). Both the texts in the Hippocratic corpus and Celsus saw the diseases of old age as chronic and mainly untreatable; emphasis was on prevention, not therapeutic cures. Galen, whose catalogue of geriatric illnesses was also similar to that of Hippocrates, attempted some remedies through remedial plants and drugs, but he too concentrated on prevention.¹³ Galen believed that, as response to foods and drugs will vary with the humours, the constitution of the body could be modified by the right diet, exercise, bathing and massage, and he devised a special regimen of health suited to the aged, which will be discussed below (see pp. 38–44).

So far, I have focused on the bodies of ageing males. Little is written about the bodies of ageing women, as procreation was a woman's principal role in life. The medical writers therefore concentrated on gynaecological problems concerning reproduction, such as conception, menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth. They were less concerned with the menopause and hardly at all with any medical problems this might have caused.¹⁴ The Hippocratic corpus mentioned that older women are more likely to suffer from displaced wombs (*Mul.* 1.7, 2.13.7); Soranus, as far as I can ascertain, made no mention of any problems particular to old women in his *Gynaecology*. Many

Graeco-Roman medical writers saw women as physically (and mentally) different from men.¹⁵ Women were believed to be innately wetter; they also absorbed more fluid from food because of their spongy texture. In ageing, however, women were thought to dry more quickly than men.¹⁶ Some believed that, generally, women were hotter than men (but lost heat through menstruation); others thought women colder.¹⁷ If women were colder and dried faster, it must be taken that, biologically, women aged faster than men, but the medical texts only show a few isolated remarks to support this view. The Hippocratic corpus argued that women aged faster because their bodies were weaker. Aristotle believed men lived longer than women thanks to their greater natural heat; he saw a woman's body as weaker than a man's because a female body was exhausted by childbirth.¹⁸ The assumption that women aged faster than men may be partly due to ancient cultural values, as was also noted by Dean-Jones.¹⁹ At Rome, a woman's main function in life was child-bearing, hence the medical writers' preoccupation with procreation. It was known that a woman's reproductive life was shorter than that of a man (a woman was thought to be able to procreate until the age of about 45–50 years and a man until the age of about 65–70), she was therefore thought of as old much earlier than a man.²⁰

Regimen of health in old age

During the late first century and the second century AD, a common and widespread interest in medicine can be noted. This was a period, often referred to by modern scholars as the age of the Second Sophistic, when intellectual men from the upper classes paid close attention to the 'self' and it can be observed that many of the educated elite had a knowledge of the art of medicine.²¹ The promotion of the self was based on care of the body; this not only involved healing in case of sickness but included a whole way of living according to certain rules in regard to diet, physical and mental exercises, bathing, massages, even rest and relaxation. In Foucault's words: 'medicine was expected to propose, in the form of regimen, a voluntary and rational structure of conduct'.²² The origins of the care of the self go back to Greek medical thought and practice. At Rome, this philosophy can be distinguished among upper-class intellectuals throughout the classical period, but during the age of the Second Sophistic the literature of regimen was more widespread and more detailed.

It was believed that following a regimen of health meant the preservation of life and living according to the rules of dietetics could make old age more comfortable.²³ Galen went further and claimed it could delay the onset of old age or even extend old age. In antiquity, it was thought that a good physician should look at the whole man (i.e. the soul as well as the body). The disciplines of medicine and philosophy were closely related and the looking after one's health could be approached on different levels. On a basic

functional level, moderation in eating and drinking in old age was simply a question of looking after one's own physical welfare, and an old man should eat and drink sparingly in order to keep healthy. Many examples can be found of old men who ate sparingly for reasons of health.²⁴ But, as I will show, moderate intake of food and drink also had moral overtones and the need for a regimen of health can be found both in the medical and philosophical texts.

On food and drink suited to old age

References to the importance of dietetics already appeared in the Hippocratic corpus; it was believed that all foods should be appropriate to the constitution of the body.²⁵ At Rome, the medical writers of the first and second centuries AD were very specific on what types of foods people should or should not eat, according to the seasons, their stage of life and the state of their physical condition.²⁶ In the literature of dietetics, the nature of all foodstuffs was minutely analysed and few foods were seen as neutral. Galen was the first known physician who also paid special and detailed attention to foods suited to the elderly. He believed that in old age all foods should be moistening and warming, acting as correcting agents of the old man's dry and cold constitution (remedies were always produced by prescribing the opposite, so cold by heat, dry by wet).²⁷ Galen was concerned with the particular propensities of food for the aged and whether these had restorative values, heating properties and were nourishing and light to digest. Old men were told not to eat too much starch, cheese, hard-boiled eggs, snails, onions, beans or pig meat, as these could cause obstructions difficult to cure in the old. They should not eat meat that is hard to digest, such as venison, goat or beef, but should eat fowl instead. Dried foods were seen as preferable to fresh. He also gave advice on foods and drugs which were thought to be particularly beneficial for the treatment of the ailments to which the aged are prone, such as colds and bronchitis, recommending, for example, ripe figs, pears and bread with honey-wine. He believed that the old should eat frequently, but sparingly. Galen even gave advice on the right way of preparing and seasoning foods for the old.²⁸

As wine was thought to have warming propensities, it was particularly recommended to the old, as it would heat up the cold body of age.²⁹ This was probably welcome advice, as even Cato, who was known for his frugal way of living, was said by Horace to have warmed himself with unwatered wine. Wine was also seen as beneficial for the treatment of depression, a disease to which the aged especially were thought to be prone. Plato, for example, recommended the drinking of wine in old age in order to aid the harshness of old age and to dissipate sorrow and depression. That wine would relieve the miseries of ageing was also noted in some epigrams. From Palladas:

The women mock me for being old, bidding me look at the wreck of my years in the mirror. But I, as I approach the end of my life, care not . . . with wine I make heavy care to cease.³⁰

But for good health in old age, food and wine should be taken in moderation – first of all for one's physical but also for one's mental well-being. As body and soul interacted, it was essential to look after the body in order to keep the soul healthy; as Seneca phrased it 'overloading the body with food would strangle the soul and render it less active'. (*Ep.* 15.2) Conspicuous consumption of food and drink was an emotional issue in Roman society, and the need for self-control at banquets was a topos in many moralistic texts. Copious eating and drinking of luxurious foods was seen as akin to revelling and wanton behaviour. The moralists preached frugality, a virtue which was associated with the traditional morality and values of early Rome.³¹ Ideally, frugality should start at youth, as many moralists thought a debauched lifestyle when young could speed up the ageing process and bring on a premature old age. From Cicero: 'even that very loss of strength [in old age] is more often chargeable to the dissipations of youth than to any fault of old age; for an intemperate and indulgent youth delivers to old age a body all worn out'.³² Other texts were more tolerant of a young man's youthful follies (even, when it suited him, by Cicero himself).³³ An old man, however, was always expected to show moderation.

Drunkenness, especially in public, was particularly abhorred in old age, as drunkenness was believed to lead to promiscuity. (It was doubly important for the old to drink in moderation, as old men were thought to get drunk more quickly than the young since, as their bodies were dry, they soaked up wine like sponges.³⁴) That drunkenness would lead to debauchery was a common topos in comedy. Plautus features various old men who organised luxurious banquets for festivals or a fancied young courtesan; these men were seen to be misbehaving and made themselves look ridiculous. In representations of real life however, there are few concrete cases of older or old men who were thought to have overstepped the mark of expected behaviour, which is somewhat surprising, given the number of instances of conspicuous banquets in the literary texts. This might suggest that in real life most older men would have settled down after sowing their wild oats, as Cicero suggested in his *Pro Caelio*.³⁵ There are however some examples. Mark Antony was accused of debauchery and drunken behaviour in his mature adult life, which eventually led to his political downfall.³⁶ Plutarch criticised the lifestyle of Lucullus, who was (allegedly) notorious for the giving of conspicuous banquets and who was said to have indulged in drinking bouts, revelry and other frivolities in later life.³⁷ Plutarch clearly distinguished between Lucullus' more sober earlier life as a general and politician and his later life, spent in retirement. It was Plutarch's belief that a man, even in old age, should still be useful to society.³⁸ Cicero went even further and believed that it was a

man's duty to fight old age – through following a regimen of health – so he would still be fit and able to perform any necessary public duties:

But is it our duty . . . to resist old age; to compensate for its defects by a watchful care; to fight against it as we would fight against disease; to adopt a regimen of health; to practise moderate exercise; and to take just enough of food and drink to restore our strength and not to overburden it.³⁹

But many old men must have regretted the expectation – and the physical necessity – of moderation. An epitaph on a tombstone reads: 'Baths, wine and sex ruin our bodies. But what makes life worth living, except baths, wine and sex.' Cicero treated the lack of 'heavy banquet, the loaded table and the oft-filled cup' as part of his third charge against old age (under the motto 'lack of sensual pleasures').⁴⁰ Cicero refuted this charge by depicting the physical advantages of moderation and argued that frugality in old age was a boon because it also lacked drunkenness, indigestion and loss of sleep. Cicero (through Cato) claimed that in old age intellectual conversation gave greater pleasure than any gratification of the body and recalled his pleasure in the *convivia*, the dining-clubs, where, he said, the accent was on social graces and good conversation and where the repast was modest. Medical theory was therefore bound up with morality and right conduct. An old man should eat and drink moderately for his own physical and mental well-being, but also because Roman society feared excess, especially in the old, who were expected to practise self-restraint in order to be a good role model for the young.

On exercise and personal hygiene

The literature of regimen also gave advice on exercises; as was written in the Hippocratic corpus 'Food and exercise work together to make health' (*Reg.* 1.2). Exercise was not only for the young. It was thought that in old age exercise would strengthen weakened limbs, prevent rapid decline, warm the body and help the digestion (*Reg.* 3.75). Galen especially thought it essential for old men to exercise and keep their bodies active, since their intrinsic warmth was in danger of being extinguished (*San. Tuenda* 5.3). Allowances were made for age; exercises should be moderate and gentle.⁴¹ Swinging, walking or running, light ball-playing, and – to modern eyes, perhaps, strangely – carriage rides, or being carried in a litter (the shaking was thought to exercise the body), were all seen as suitable exercises for the old. Also recommended were declaiming, reading aloud and having conversations, as these activities were believed to accelerate breathing, increase warmth and clear out the arteries.⁴² Additionally, regular bathing and massages were believed to be beneficial; the former would add moisture to the

body (it was thought that the body could absorb water through the skin) and warm the aged, while the latter was thought to stimulate a weakening digestion and relieve fatigue.⁴³ After exercise and lunch, a siesta was recommended, as can be learned from Galen who quoted an unnamed poet: 'When he has bathed and eaten, let him sleep softly: this is the privilege of age' *San. Tuenda* 5.3.1).

Many an old man was said to exercise. Seneca thought carriage riding ideal, as it shook the body and could exercise the mind at the same time, since a carriage ride did not stop one from reading and study; he also went running (*Ep.* 15.6, 83.3–7). Seneca wrote about his own experience, but several Roman writers were able to provide examples of old men who were extremely fit in old age and who were said to keep both body and mind healthy through exercise and constant practice; these men were held up as exemplars. A few examples should suffice. Cicero admired the 90-year-old Masinissa, king of Numidia. Masinissa was even at this extreme old age said to be physically strong and active. He practised horse-riding and walking; indeed, his extreme fitness, his daily activities and sexual potency in old age were almost legendary. Cicero, who, as mentioned above, thought old men should be of practical use of society, argued that Masinissa, through exercise and self-control, preserved some of his original vigour in old age, and was therefore still able to fulfil his kingly duties.⁴⁴ Pliny has the example of Spurinna who played ball, went for walks and carriage rides, bathed, read aloud and had good conversations with friends, and was therefore said to have reached his seventy-seventh year in both physical and mental good health. His active life, physically and mentally, was just the kind of retirement Pliny himself aspired to, when the time came.⁴⁵ One of Galen's case studies depicted the exemplary lifestyle of the physician Antiochus, who lived well into his eighties. Antiochus still visited the sick, even at his extreme old age, on foot or by carriage. He was said to eat sparingly at the right time of the day, of the right kind of food. He visited the baths daily, where he also exercised and had his body massaged – the reason why, Galen claimed, Antiochus lived to a hale and hearty old age (*San. Tuenda* 5.4). Galen made similar claims for himself. Galen, who lived at least till the age of 70 (and maybe older), boasted to have been free of the diseases associated with old age because he followed a regimen of health (*San. Tuenda* 5.1).

So from Cicero's time onwards we find many references, both in the medical and moralistic texts, to the necessity for the old to follow regimens of health. These regimens were age specific: men must live according to their age and constitution and an older man must live, eat, drink and exercise differently from a younger one. It was seen as essential to keep both body and mind active in order to keep old age at bay and to be more comfortable in old age itself.⁴⁶ During the age of the Second Sophistic, the following of a regimen of dietetics could regulate someone's entire way of living. The physician Athenaeus (first century AD) wrote:

There is practically no moment, either of night or day, in which we have no need of the medical art, but in walking and sitting, in massage and bathing, in eating and drinking, in sleeping and waking, and in every day activity throughout our lives, we have need of good counsel to avoid impairment and make the best use of our existence.⁴⁷

The old should therefore know what was good for them. Athenaeus believed that the most beautiful old age was enjoyed by those who distinguished themselves by their education and knowledge, intellectual interests, by abstention from material pleasures and by the harmony of their soul.⁴⁸

The physician Galen especially was much concerned with healthcare of the old. He realised that the old could not be restored to health; he therefore believed prevention was better than cure. Galen's claims for his regimen of dietetics were substantial. He wrote, in *San. Tuenda* (5.1):

[a regimen of health] keep[s] a man growing old to an advanced age, free from suffering in his senses, healthy through everything, without sickness, without pain, intact of life, except if he had been wholly diseased from the beginning.

He also showed common sense. He realised that not all old men were the same and that it would therefore be impossible to have one plan of life that would be beneficial for all; in his own practice he also took an old man's own innate constitution and former habits into consideration (*San. Tuenda* 5.11).

The physicians were authoritative, but they accepted that an old man had to learn for himself what was good for him and that there was no need to refer constantly to a physician.⁴⁹ Many must have been in the habit of doing so, as Tiberius ridiculed the habit of running to one's physicians for advice. He declared that no man over the age of 30 ought to need advice about what was good or bad for him, and he repeated this maxim even when he was old and his health was failing.⁵⁰ Many of the philosophically minded thought that the individual was responsible for knowing himself, learning for himself what was good for him. Following a regimen of health required self-reliance and self-control. The care of the self required a well-ordered way of living, a plan of conduct which was believed to be particularly suited to the old. As Pliny (*Ep.* 3.1.2) phrased it:

A well-ordered life, especially where the old are concerned, gives me the same pleasure as the fixed course of the planets. A certain amount of irregularity and excitement is not unsuitable for the young, but their elders should lead a quiet and orderly existence . . .

It can be seen from the letters of the educated elite – for instance, Cicero,

Seneca, Pliny, Fronto and M. Aurelius – that many mature and older men took a considerable interest in their mental and physical welfare, and that many did follow a well-regulated daily discipline.

Following a regimen took education, time and money; it is therefore of importance to note that the literature of regimen was written for the educated rich. It was noted in the Hippocratic corpus that the poor lacked time and money to follow a regimen of health and had to eat whatever they had, and Soranus noted that the poor could get their exercise from their daily business.⁵¹ We have little evidence of a woman's approach to health in ageing. The literature of regimen was written mainly with men in mind.⁵² Women did exercise; their regimen was passive and less strenuous than that of men. Recommendations (without a reference to age) ranged from walking, carriage riding, baths and massages, to voice exercises and housework.⁵³ Apart from housework, these exercises were similar to those suggested for old men; here too, women were considered as weaker creatures than men. Older women may have exercised, but we are not told about it and I have not come across any examples of a daily routine of health practised by individual old women.

How did the elderly cope with the diseases of old age?

The leading of a healthy life was under one's own control, but, in spite of Galen's claims that following a regimen of health kept old age at bay, the majority of the elderly had to put up with some form of decrepitude at some stage of their ageing process. As Celsus wrote: 'rarely does any old man not have some weak part in their body'.⁵⁴ Cicero, in *De Senectute*, mentioned 'weakness of the body' as the second charge against old age, one out of four reasons why old age appears to be unhappy. Cicero, and other authors of philosophical texts on old age, found reasons to refute this charge (most commonly by arguing that young people get ill too or by giving examples of old men who were still physically fit). It can be seen, however, that many old men in real life, even those with a philosophical inclination, found the physical decline and illnesses of old age difficult to cope with.⁵⁵

I shall start by considering how two old men from the second century AD, the orator Fronto and his pupil the emperor Marcus Aurelius, coped with the physical deterioration of ageing. As mentioned above, in the second century AD, the age of the Second Sophistic, many intellectuals were obsessed with their personal health, and with pain and suffering of the body, to such an extent that the obsession became a widespread cultural phenomenon. The problems Fronto and Aurelius experienced in ageing must therefore be considered in this light.

Much of the extant personal correspondence of Fronto to Marcus Aurelius deals with physical matters; according to Champlin, about a quarter of Fronto's extant letters deal with his own personal physical sufferings.⁵⁶ Fronto

lived until the age of about 72 and his letters covered both his ageing process and his old age.⁵⁷ His complaints were especially numerous from his early fifties until the age of around 61. The diseases he said he suffered from were the diseases of old age, from rheumatism in many of his limbs (knees, neck, groin, elbow, arms, feet, toes, shoulder, ankles, hands, fingers, spine) to gout and colds. It can be seen that Fronto did not take pain well and that he was a consistent moaner. He regularly began his correspondence with a complaint about his physical condition. For example, he began a letter to the emperor Antoninus (written when Fronto was aged 68) with the words: 'This has been the fifth day since I have been seized with pain in all my limbs, but especially in my neck and groin.'⁵⁸ He may have suffered from aches and pains, but we learn from his letters – and an aside remark from his friend and contemporary Aulus Gellius – that his bodily ailments did not prevent him leading a busy public and social life and that he particularly enjoyed stimulating conversations and arguments with his friends.⁵⁹ He could therefore, if he so wished, put his physical discomforts aside. This is one of the reasons why some modern scholars, probably finding Fronto's almost neurotic preoccupation with bodily suffering difficult to abide, have seen him as a hypochondriac, but there is no evidence that he was seen as such by his contemporaries.⁶⁰ His pupil, the emperor Marcus Aurelius, wrote many letters of commiseration on the illnesses of his tutor; his sympathy was to be expected from a younger man for his elderly tutor, but his letters also show a genuine liking for what many modern readers would consider a cantankerous old man.

Fronto probably died from the plague and not from one of his many geriatric complaints. There is little doubt that he felt his age and that he found it difficult to cope with the physical disabilities that came with ageing. In the last years of his life he frequently complained he was an old man, about to die.⁶¹ It is of interest that he expected allowances to be made for the disabilities of his age. The preoccupation of his time with bodily matters would certainly have cultivated a fixation with physical health, and encouraged his writing about it, but it cannot have been entirely responsible for Fronto's self-pitying attitude. Personality must also have played an important factor, as some of his contemporaries were able to cope with the infirmities of age, as, for example, Antoninus Pius, whose physical disability will be discussed on p. 47.

Fronto's pupil, the emperor Marcus Aurelius, had leanings towards stoicism, which fostered his belief that physical ailments should not affect work, study and thought. Aurelius, for example, said he had great regard for Epicurus, who was admired in the ancient texts for bravely ignoring his final illness at the age of 71. Epicurus, who suffered from strangury and an ulcerated stomach, was said to have been often in great pain, but he continued his philosophical discussions right until the very end. Accordingly, Marcus Aurelius did not elaborate much on his own health in his *Meditations* – a

private notebook with philosophical reflections written to himself – in which he treated pain and death in a philosophical and abstract way.⁶² In his personal correspondence to Fronto he did not show this restraint, and it may be of interest here to learn that Avidius Cassius reputedly saw Marcus Aurelius as nothing more than a philosophical old woman (*philosopham aniculam*).⁶³

Many of Marcus Aurelius' concerns on health matters were a response to Fronto's sufferings, but his letters showed he had his own health worries. He too liked to write about them, presumably for sympathy.⁶⁴ It is known that Marcus Aurelius suffered from ill-health throughout his life; he was weak in the body (according to Dio because of his close application to study), he suffered from insomnia, frequent colds, had stomach problems and chest pains, for which he took the drug *theriac*.⁶⁵ In reply to a letter, in which Fronto complained about his own health and enquired about the health of his pupil, Marcus Aurelius responded: 'I think I have got through the night without fever. I have taken food without repugnance, and am doing very nicely now. We shall see what the night brings.'⁶⁶ It is of note that Marcus Aurelius saw himself as old and weak when he was in his early fifties, which could, even in ancient terms, not be termed as exactly old. Dio put in his mouth a speech to his soldiers, set in AD 175 (when he was about 54 years of age), in which he was said to have referred to himself as 'already an old man and weak, unable to take either food without pain or sleep without anxiety'.⁶⁷

So like his tutor, Marcus Aurelius felt his age. He may have committed suicide at the age of 59, according to a biography which appears in the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*. M. Aurelius, we are told, was eager to die and refrained from taking food and drink after he contracted an illness when on campaign, which aggravated the disease.⁶⁸ In his philosophical notebooks, Marcus Aurelius thought suicide justifiable only if one was no longer in full possession of one's reasoning power (on this, see [Chapter 3](#)), but he generally thought that one should be indifferent to physical pain and bodily inconveniences. He disliked being on campaign, and we know from Dio that the frailness of his body made him feel the cold. He was known to have been depressed and disappointed in the character and behaviour of his son Commodus. He was of a pessimistic nature and often talked about death, which, as a Stoic, held no fear for him.⁶⁹ If we accept the suicide theory, Marcus Aurelius, feeling depressed, old and tired, with a body weakened by illness, may have been unable to cope and have given up on life. With more certainty, it can be seen that he found ageing difficult; his letters, however, lacked Fronto's self-pitying tone and self-obsession. Marcus Aurelius' concern for his physical well-being cannot be divorced from the fascination with health and bodily suffering of his time, but here, as in Fronto's case, his concern was driven by a weak constitution and a pessimistic nature.

There are, however, some clear instances which show that the way one experienced one's physical deterioration could be influenced by cultural and

intellectual dimensions. An example can be found in the effects of the literature of the physiognomists. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the physiognomists thought true nature was revealed by physical appearance and stature, gesture, voice and gait. A strong and healthy body was associated with sincerity, masculinity and power. It was believed the manner of one's gait could reveal whether one was composed or suffered from inner disorder. The second century AD physiognomist and Sophist Polemo wrote: 'You should know that a certain amplitude in a man's stride signifies trustworthiness, sincerity, liberality, and a high-minded nature free from anger.'⁷⁰ This type of attitude would obviously have had repercussions for the aged, who often suffered from walking difficulties. Physiognomy enjoyed a widespread popularity at Rome in the second century AD, which may explain the action of the emperor Antoninus Pius. Antoninus Pius lived until his seventieth year and was a friend and contemporary of Polemo; he suffered from what was likely to have been osteoporosis. He was said to be tall in stature, but when he was bent by old age he had himself swathed with splints of lindenwood bound on his chest in order that he might walk erect.⁷¹

Some old men therefore cared about what social impact they made. It was important in the 'face-to-face society', the competitive society of the educated Roman elite of the second century AD, to make a good visual impression and to take care of one's deportment and self-representation, which must have been particularly difficult for those suffering from some of the geriatric illnesses.⁷² The appearance of dignity, represented by the right deportment and posture, was associated with good character and those in the public eye who were tall and handsome were admired and popular. Pliny, in his *Panegyric*, described Trajan as tall and impressive looking.⁷³ Clement of Alexandria wrote a book of advice on deportment for upper-class (Christian) gentleman, entitled *Paedagogos* ('Tutor'). No wonder it was important to Antoninus Pius to walk tall.

The science of physiognomy was still favoured in the fourth century AD, as we know from the writings of the physiognomist Adamantius, who was a contemporary of Libanius of Antioch. Libanius suffered from gout in old age; he tried to conceal the symptoms of his illness after his enemies accused him of a 'vulgar' (*mikropropes*) way of walking and he complained about a (perceived) unpopularity which he blamed on his disability; he was about 67 years of age at the time.⁷⁴ A hasty, hesitant or mincing gait was seen as effeminate and was associated with sexual deviances. Clement of Alexandria wrote: 'A true gentleman must have no mark of effeminacy visible on his face, or any other part of his body. Let no blot on his manliness then, be ever found either in his movements or his habits.' Libanius must have been aware of this; his pupil Dio Chrysostom, argued that someone's mode of walking reflected character and disposition.⁷⁵ As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the literature of physiognomy was unkind to the physique of the old without even mentioning old age.

So it can be seen that the way the elderly coped with physical deterioration was also influenced by the social and intellectual dimensions of their lives. In some old men this led to a tendency to hypochondria, and they seem to have taken a delight in writing about their bodily ailments. Other old men were affected by the competitive 'face-to-face' society of the time. To these old men self-representation was very important and, rather than accentuating their bodily pains, they attempted to conceal the symptoms of their condition, especially if their ailments affected a deterioration of bodily posture, as caused by osteoporosis, arthritis or gout.

But even before the age of the Second Sophistic, instances of preoccupation with the physical deterioration of ageing can be found. Seneca (c. 4 BC–AD 65), too, was engrossed by decay and his own physical health in ageing. After a visit to his country estate, which was dilapidated because of age according to his estate-manager, Seneca turned to the subject of his own ageing and to philosophical musings on old age, which he regarded with a mild optimism and which he said he found, under the right circumstances (that is, a strong mind and a body only in slight decline) acceptable and even enjoyable.⁷⁶ But Seneca could also grumble about the deterioration of his own health – certainly not as frequently as Fronto, but he could, at times, be just as obsessed about the physical problems he encountered in ageing.⁷⁷ Seneca wrote his letters to Lucilius when he was in his late sixties; he was, like Aurelius, of a Stoic disposition. But unlike Fronto and Marcus Aurelius, Seneca wrote with publication in mind, therefore he must not have seen his complaints as obsessive and he presumably expected empathy from his readers.

Seneca moaned about weakness of the body in ageing; he felt, at times, old and tired. We learn he suffered from asthma and chronic catarrhal problems – life-long problems which he said he could cope with in youth, but found more difficult in old age when the body was weak. He even considered suicide because of these attacks, but the thought of his old father kept him back. Catarrhal attacks may seem trivial to us today (Seneca complained he was reduced to continuous snuffles), and certainly no reason for suicide, but Seneca found them debilitating and wrote that his attacks had reduced him to extreme thinness (*Ep.* 78.1–2). In his tragedies, he frequently depicted the old as slow and wearied, a feeling he could probably identify with. Seneca, like Fronto and Aurelius after him, did not suffer in silence.⁷⁸

Seneca could also treat his physical deterioration with humour. In one of his letters he complained about his increasing weakness in old age and how easily he tired. He wrote: 'A brief space has been given over to bodily exercise, and on this ground I can thank old age – my exercise costs very little effort; as soon as I stir, I am tired. And weariness is the aim and end of exercise, no matter how strong one is' (*Ep.* 83.3). Seneca had the ability to joke about himself, but he nonetheless looked after his physical welfare. As mentioned above, he exercised regularly. He made some concessions to his age and he no longer took the cold baths of which he said he was fond; he

also ate sparingly and took a short nap after his exercise and meal (*Ep.* 83.4–6). Seneca's philosophical letters speak about acceptance and endurance of pain,⁷⁹ but it can nevertheless be established that he found it difficult to cope with the physical deterioration of his body in ageing.

Ovid is another example of someone who regularly complained about failing strength as he grew older. He did not suffer from a particular illness, but he felt himself old, tired and weary when he was only in his fifties; this was the age at which he was exiled to Tomis on the Black Sea. From his poetry, we know that he missed Roman society, his friends and stimulating intellectual conversations, which made him feel old and tired somewhat prematurely. Ovid's loneliness made him feel his age, which was reflected in his poetry: 'Already the years of frailty and life's inactive times are stealing upon me / and already 'tis hard for me in my weakness to bear up' (*Trist.* 4.8.3). Ovid's physical problems were caused by a depressed mind, which aggravated his ageing process, as acknowledged by Ovid himself: 'I . . . am weakened by the measureless series of my woes and am perforce an old man before my time' (*Pont.* 1.4.19–20). Ovid's problems may have been caused by his circumstances, but his weariness is likely to have been genuine. The physical problems of Marcus Aurelius, too, were heightened by his mental disposition. Of interest is De Luce's suggestion that Ovid's age and depression had a negative influence on his creativity (his writings had become more repetitive), but we do not know if Ovid's *Tristia* was less favourably received than his previous works.⁸⁰ In [Chapters 3](#) and [4](#) I shall consider the intellectual and mental aspects of ageing separately; however, there is a clear and close interrelationship between the physical and the mental which is worth highlighting here.

So some old men found the physical decline in ageing hard to bear. Others managed to overcome their physical infirmities. An example would be the emperor Galba, whose hands and feet were said by Suetonius to be so deformed by arthritis that at times he could not unroll or hold a parchment and he had to walk with a crutch.⁸¹ Notwithstanding his old age and physical disability, he was proclaimed emperor by his army at the age of 72 and marched on Rome. Galba, therefore, could ignore his physical infirmities, and his mental disposition took precedence over physical deterioration – what we would now call mind over matter – presumably because of personal ambition. His example also shows that a physical handicap as such was not necessarily problematical in leading a full public life.⁸² Even the old and blind could continue their senatorial duties, as can be seen from the example of Appius Claudius, who became blind in old age, probably through cataracts.⁸³ These different examples accentuate the complexities of how old men experienced the physical infirmities of old age, which were not only affected by personal attitude, outlook on life and individual constitution but also by certain intellectual and social dimensions current at the time.

On suicide due to extreme bodily suffering

As I have shown, many of the elderly experienced difficulties in coping with the pain and suffering caused by the illnesses of old age. In the knowledge that these diseases would be long term and incurable, some saw suicide as an escape. What was Rome's attitude to suicide brought about by extreme bodily pain? After a brief summary of some of the philosophical schools' stances to suicide, I shall look at some examples of known individuals who decided on suicide when they could no longer cope with their geriatric infirmities.⁸⁴

The Stoics generally saw voluntary death (*mors voluntaria*) as justifiable in cases of extreme bodily pain, but only if the decision to do so was made calmly. All the pros and cons of taking one's own life should be weighed up rationally. Suicide should not be a cowardly avoidance of pain, and the Stoics did not approve of suicide because of a deathwish (*libido moriendi*). The Epicureans were more confused by suicide, which they thought permissible when the balance of pain over pleasure became unbearable. But they also thought that the wise man should not be subdued by illness and should maintain the balance of pleasure even when the body is in pain. As mentioned earlier, Epicurus was said to have been happy even when in extreme pain.⁸⁵ The Epicureans had reservations about suicide and were generally thought to be averse to it. The Cynics were perhaps the most tolerant on the subject of suicide, which to them was permissible in cases of excessive pain due to old age or illness.⁸⁶ The Cynics were the only philosophical school which mentioned old age as a specific reason for suicide. A few philosophical schools categorically prohibited suicide, even when one was in severe pain or incurably ill. The Pythagoreans, for example, thought death should be natural and to take one's own life was thought of as an interference with Nature.⁸⁷ Plato was explicitly against suicide in *Phaedo*, but seems to have relaxed his attitude in *Laws*, where he gave several situations in which he saw suicide as allowable. Plato, who lived until the age of about 80, probably wrote *Laws* in the last decade of his life, which possibly influenced his more moderate attitude. It is, however, of interest that he did not see 'irremediable pain' among the situations in which suicide would be condoned.⁸⁸ Aristotle believed it was cowardly to give in to bodily pain (*NE* 3.1116a12). In the legal texts, Ulpian listed 'intolerance of bad health' among the legitimate grounds for self-killing (*Dig.* 28.3.6.7). Suicide was, therefore, albeit often reluctantly, accepted by many of the philosophical schools, while only a few were categorically against it.

The writings of the first century AD – for example Seneca, Tacitus, Pliny – feature a number of instances of suicide among old men, whose bodily pain in old age was said to have become unbearable. It is of note that all the data came second-hand (usually from friends) and none from the suicidal person himself. There are no extant suicide notes, or letters. The courage of those who committed suicide was generally admired. Nepos commented on

Cicero's friend Atticus, an Epicurean, who starved himself to death when he was incurably ill at the age of 78. Nepos, a younger contemporary of Atticus, saw Atticus' suicide as a facing up to reality and admired his courage (21.3–4). Seneca, who, as shown above, found it difficult to come to terms with his physical deterioration in ageing, greatly feared a total decline of the body and mind. If that happened, he thought suicide totally justifiable and he even thought it cowardly to remain inactive and passively to await death. But, he believed, the decision should not be taken lightly. He criticised those who committed suicide simply because they were tired of life or because of minor ailments. Suicide should always be a last resort; he wrote:

Just as a ship that springs a leak, you can always stop the first or the second fissure, but when many holes begin to open and let in water, the gaping hull cannot be saved; similarly, in an old man's body, there is a certain limit up to which you can sustain and prop its weakness. But when it comes to resemble a decrepit building, – when every joint begins to spread and while one is being repaired another falls apart – then it is time for a man to look about him and consider how he may get out.⁸⁹

Seneca, however, sent out mixed messages. He also admired his friend, the Epicurean Aufidius Bassus, who decided to brave out his illness and await death passively when his health in old age had completely collapsed. We are told that that Bassus' mind was still active and his philosophical beliefs were said to be strong. It appears that Seneca respected his friend's courage in facing his lingering and painful death, in spite of his own tolerance of suicide expressed elsewhere.⁹⁰

Ambiguity can also be found in Pliny's writings. He admired the courage of those who decided to take their own lives, but he also gives the impression that he thought they took the easier way out. Pliny, for instance, respected his friend Rufus, who starved himself to death the age of 67 when suffering from gout. We are told Rufus contracted the disease at the age of 32. When he was still young and active the disease was limited to his feet, so he could keep it under control, but when the gout spread to his whole body Rufus decided he could no longer manage. Old age had exacerbated his disease and perhaps he thought that at this stage of life death would not be far away and a voluntary death meant he could die with dignity. Rufus' decision to commit suicide was not taken lightly; he carefully weighed up all the pros and cons for taking his own life and Pliny admired him for this.

But Pliny appears reluctant to accept Rufus' decision to end his painful struggle, and there is the distinct impression that he thought Rufus had not shown enough concern for others. Pliny appears to show a greater admiration for another friend, Titius Aristo, who seriously contemplated suicide and decided against it.⁹¹ Aristo had considered suicide if his illness proved to be

hopeless, but was prepared to struggle on with his pain if, according to his physicians, his illness was not fatal, in order to spare his wife, daughter and friends the distress of his self-inflicted death. For Aristo, therefore, social commitments took precedence over physical pain, which greatly impressed Pliny. The idea was not uncommon. For example, Tacitus mentioned a mother who was prevented by her son-in-law from committing suicide because her adult daughter was still dependent on her.⁹²

Van Hooft noted that old men are far more frequent in the corpus of self-killings than old women.⁹³ The only example I have come across of an old woman, who committed suicide in order to escape the miseries of old age, was related by Valerius Maximus. He depicted a woman of Keos, said to be over 90 years of age (but still sound of mind and body), who wished to follow a local tradition which prescribed self-killing by the aged. Valerius Maximus, who said he had been an eye-witness, recorded that Sextus Pompeius could not dissuade her.⁹⁴ We do not have much information on how the lower classes and the poor coped with the diseases of old age, but Pliny gave an example of an old man who jumped into a lake because he suffered from an incurable ulcer; he was said to have been heroically followed by his wife, also elderly (*Ep.* 6.24).

It is interesting to note the 'public face' of the majority of the known suicides. A certain Pomponius Bassulus advertised the occasion of his suicide on his tombstone, a text which could be read by all passers-by: 'But vexed by anxieties of a hard-pressed mind, as well as numerous pains of the body, so both were extremely disgusting, I procured for myself the death I wished for.'⁹⁵ Many of those who killed themselves were surrounded by family and friends at their death. Even the decision to commit suicide became a public event. Atticus, for example, sent for his son-in-law and some friends to tell them of his decision. This may be because suicide was seen as an act of courage and a public suicide would enable one to die with dignity; another factor might be the wish to protect the household from accusations of murder. In any case, death in antiquity was more generally an event when one was surrounded by family and friends, and death through suicide was no exception.

Judging from the evidence from the first and second centuries AD, we get the impression that self-killing was not unusual among the elderly intellectuals of that time. We cannot be sure if this is the case, as Griffin points out we do not know if the numbers of suicides actually increased; it may just be the frequent use of suicide as a literary theme that became more fashionable in the early empire.⁹⁶ But in favour of the argument it must be noted that in this period, which ended years of civil wars, proscriptions and a change in the political system, the intellectual upper classes had more time on their hands for preoccupation with the self, their bodies and their philosophical musings. Stoicism especially put much emphasis on 'dying nobly' and taught not to fear death, which might have encouraged self-killing.⁹⁷ A

fragment of the Stoic Musonius, first century AD, says: 'Choose to die well while it is possible, lest shortly it may become necessary for you to die, but it will no longer be possible to die well.'⁹⁸ Some even committed suicide before reaching old age in order to escape its miseries, as Caninius Rebilus was said to have done.⁹⁹

Euthanasia, in the sense of the administering by a physician of drugs or poisons to end life, which is an important contemporary moral and legal issue, was also not an option for those physicians loyal to the Hippocratic oath, which read: 'I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody who asks for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect.'¹⁰⁰ However, a physician could decide not to treat a patient whose illness was hopeless. Plato, for example, admired Asklepios for refusing to prolong the life of those who were incurably ill and so prolong a wretched existence.¹⁰¹ Besides, physicians could be indirectly involved in the suicide of their patients by telling them whether their illness was terminal or not, as was the case with Pliny's friend Titus Aristo. Suicide, therefore, when one's bodily sufferings became too much, was generally acceptable in Roman society. There is, however, the distinct impression that suicide should be a last resort and social duties to one's family and friends should also be an important consideration.

Physical weaknesses in the more popular literary sources

As physical decline was biologically inevitable, the more popular literary sources (comedy, tragedy, poetry, satire) almost universally characterised old age by physical decay and decrepitude of some sort. As Ovid wrote:

O Time, thy great devourer, and thou, envious Age,
together you destroy all things; and, slowly gnawing
with your teeth you finally consume all things in lingering death.¹⁰²

Lack of strength in old age, slowness of movement, trembling of limbs and voices were commonly mentioned and these characteristics were sometimes used as attributes of old age simply to denote a person's advanced age.¹⁰³ The popular sources show that the slowness of the aged could attract scorn, especially by the young, who had no patience for such things. The prejudice against the physique of the old in the more popular fictional literary writings was a contrast to moralists' belief in the intellectual superiority of the old, a subject which will be discussed in [Chapter 5](#). The two polarised views of old age (old age as a time of wisdom and reverence, and old age as a time of physical decay and scorn) were well exemplified in one of Ovid's tales in *Metamorphoses*. In this tale (8.630ff.), the goddess Pallas desired to give advice to a young girl. For this, she assumed the form of an old woman by putting

on the attributes of old age: a grey wig and a staff to sustain her tottering limbs. Pallas expected that the girl would give her the respect which would be her due as an old woman and that she would listen to the experienced voice of age. Pallas approached the girl with the words: 'Old age has some things at least that are not to be despised, experience comes with the years.' The young girl spurned her, however, and only saw the wreckage of old age and replied scornfully: 'Doting in mind you come to me, and spent with old age; and it is too long a life that is your bane.'

Satire and comedy were particularly brutal in their depiction of the physical infirmities of old age. In comedy, derision for the decrepitude of the old was often portrayed as part of a generation clash between a young man and his father. The old man, in a position of authority, was thought to be intent on spoiling the fun of a young man, who retaliated by using derogatory and snide remarks about the physique of his aged parent. When it was not used as a subject of scorn to win amusement from an audience, the attributes of old age were at best portrayed as irritating. Even the old themselves bemoaned their physical decrepitude.¹⁰⁴ An old man in Plautus' *Menaechmi* (756ff.) complained:

For I've lost my nimbleness . . . the years have taken hold of me . . .
it's a heavy body I carry . . . strength has left me. Ah, old age is a bad
thing – a bad tribulation when it comes . . . If I were to specify them
all, it would be a long, long story.

A stereotypical depiction of old age indeed, but one the audience could identify with.

In satire we find many depictions of the old as physical wrecks, whose appearance was despised by the young. Lucian portrayed a nonagenarian, who was said to have only three teeth left in his mouth, whose nose was stuffed with phlegm and his eyes with rheum. He could hardly walk and had to be supported by four servants; he was seen as a 'living tomb'.¹⁰⁵ One of the most savage portrayals came from Juvenal (*Sat.* 10.198–203, 217–218, 226–228). He depicted the physical condition of the old as loathsome and repulsive, not only to others but also to themselves:

But old men all look alike, their voices are as shaky as their limbs,
their heads without hair, their noses drivelling as in childhood.
Their bread, poor wretches, has to be munched by toothless gums.
So offensive do they become to their wives, their children, themselves,
that even the legacy-hunter, Cossus, turns from them in disgust.
Their sluggish palate takes joy in wine or food no longer . . .
. . . Besides all this, the little blood in his now chilly
frame is never warm except with fever; diseases of kind
dance around him in a troop . . .

One suffers in the shoulders, another in the loins, a third
in the hip; another has lost both eyes and envies
those who have one . . .

The elderly's physical disabilities denoted a loss of human dignity. In his continuing lines Juvenal imputed that the old could not even feed themselves, he likened their gaping mouths to that of a swallow's chick, waiting for the mother to fill it. But Juvenal's fictional portrait of the old was likely to have a firm foundation in reality. Pliny depicted the indignity suffered by the aged Domitius Tullus, who was so crippled and deformed in every limb that he had to have his teeth cleaned for him by his slaves: 'a squalid and pitiful detail', Pliny wrote, and we are told that Tullus was often heard to complain about the humiliation of having to lick the fingers of his slaves daily (*Ep.* 8.18.9).

Juvenal's catalogue of geriatric infirmities was endless, but his list was matched by that of Maximianus, the sixth century AD elegist. It is quite possible that Maximianus knew Juvenal's satires; his descriptions of the old man's physical infirmities closely resembled Juvenal's. However, while Juvenal emphasised the grotesque and showed no sympathy, Maximianus' catalogue, though no less horrific, lacked the satirist's biting sarcasm and showed more understanding for the plight of the old. Of interest are Maximianus' accurate observations and his eye for detail.¹⁰⁶ He, for example, noted the symptoms of what would now be recognised as osteoporosis (just the kind of condition Antoninus Pius was trying to prevent by strapping himself up with splints):

His carriage, colour, walk as he goes by,
His shape are not the same as they once were.
His cloak falls down from shoulder hunching over
And what was short now seems to him quite long.
We shrink together, grow wonderfully smaller;
You'd think our very bones have been diminished.
We can't look upward; old age now looks downward
At earth from which it came, soon to return . . .¹⁰⁷

For the two authors, old age brought only miseries; death was the only answer – as Maximianus wrote: 'Why torture miserable men with added pain?' (*Elegy* 1.233). It is noteworthy that Juvenal and Maximianus were both old themselves when they wrote their depictions of old age.¹⁰⁸ For Juvenal and Maximianus, old age was a topos, but looking behind their poetic exaggeration I suspect we are left with two old men who, although living four centuries apart, were irritated by the physical weakness and ailments of old age, some of which they undoubtedly experienced themselves. Indeed, Maximianus' fictional self-pitying attitude is not far removed from

Fronto's groans about his physical sufferings. I would suggest that the physical representation of the old in the fictional literary sources mirrored the irritations many real old men seem to have had.

Conclusion

Negative attitudes to the physical condition of old age can be found in representations of real life and the fictional literary sources alike, and there is no doubt that many feared the deterioration of the body in growing old. Interestingly, we have some instances of first-hand evidence of how real old people coped with the physical infirmities of old age, such as the personal correspondence between Fronto and M. Aurelius and the more public letters of Seneca. Although certain current intellectual dimensions, such as the age of the Second Sophistic, cannot be ignored, concern for physical health in old age was universal and was not limited to a particular time; examples can be found throughout antiquity. For instance, in the fourth century BC, Aristotle defined a happy old age as 'one that comes slowly with freedom from pain . . . unless a man is free from illness and is strong, he will never be free from suffering'. About five centuries later, Juvenal advised his audience to pray to the gods, not for longevity but for 'a sound mind in a sound body'.¹⁰⁹

Part II

INTELLECTUAL ASPECTS
OF OLD AGE

DECLINE OF THE INTELLECT

Did the ancient Romans think the intellect declined in ageing, or did they believe that judicious absorption of experience could bring a greater degree of wisdom? This chapter analyses those texts which traced an intellectual decline over the course of life linked to the inevitable physiological deterioration of the body. Although the terms 'intellectual' and 'mental' are synonymous (meaning 'of the mind or the intellect', *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*), the term 'mental' can also specifically be used to describe character and disposition. In view of this the term 'intellectual' is used when purely rational qualities are involved and 'mental' when disposition is also involved.

Theoretical doctrines

When the age is in, the wit is out.

Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, Act III.5.33

Not only Shakespeare, but many in the ancient world too – and indeed over the ages – subscribed to the view that the intellect would decline over the course of life. However, there were differences of opinion on *when* this would happen. Some doctrines believed both body and mind would decline over time, but saw a different rate of decline between the physical and the intellectual. A second conception saw a parallel development between mind and body so that, when a man passes his prime, both mind and body would deteriorate simultaneously; the mind would therefore decline in line with the body. A third conception distinguished physically and mentally between old age (*senectus*) and extreme old age (*senium* or *aetas decrepita*); only the latter stage was associated with an intellectual decline.

A differential decline of the intellect in old age

The examples from this section come from the literature which divided the course of life into different ages. In these divisions, the stages of life were determined by biological and also by social and cultural factors. My two

chosen authors are Solon, seventh–sixth century BC, and Aristotle, fourth century BC. Despite being Greek and out of my main period of concentration, they are of importance. Firstly, their sayings and writings were well known at Rome and their work influenced many later Roman writings on divisions of the life-course. More importantly, from their other writings we can reconstruct how they personally felt about their own ageing process, and it can be found that these feelings do not correspond with the attributes they gave to ‘old age’ (as a stage in life) in their divisions of the life-course.¹

Solon’s *Elegy on the Ages of Men* was one of the first known divisions of the course of life; his age grades, ten ages in all (covering a span of seven years each), corresponded to physical conditions and to social life. For the first four stages of life, Solon gives only physical characteristics, an infant slowly ages and grows to physical maturity at the age of 28. Social duties, such as marriage and children, enter the next phase (ages 28–35). The mind is thought to mature at a different rate to the body and only comes to full maturity in the sixth stage of life (ages 35–42), this stage also sees the onset of physical deterioration. He saw the use of language at its best in the seventh and eight periods of life (ages 42–49 and 49–56). On the last two stages of life he wrote:

He can still do much in his ninth period, but there is a weakening
seen in his ability both to think and speak. {ages 56–63}
But if he completes ten ages of seven years each, full measure,
death, when it comes, can no longer be said to come too soon.
{ages 63–70}²

In this poem, the mind starts to decline between the ages of 56 and 63, and the age of 70 sees total recession and misery. Solon depicted a generally negative view of old age, even though a man in the early stage of ageing could still be of some use to society. His view on extreme old age, the tenth period, was grim indeed.

Solon himself, however, does not appear to have feared old age in spite of the pessimism shown in his elegy. In a famous reply to the poet Mimnermus, he seems to have cherished the thought of growing old. To Mimnermus’ words ‘May the fate of death find me, free from disease and burdensome troubles, at the age of 60’, Solon reputedly replied: ‘But if even at this late date you will still listen to me, strike that out (and don’t be upset because I have put it better than you), change it and sing it like this, “Ligiastades” [Mimnermus]: “may the fate of death find me at age eighty”.’³ Moreover, Solon, who reached the age of about 79, apparently declared that he continued to learn something new every day, even when he was growing old; an accomplishment which was remarked upon, and admired, in several Roman texts.⁴ Solon’s words and actions hardly reflect the attitude of someone who believed that in early old age (56–63) a man’s ability to

think and speak was weakening and who saw total destruction at the age of 70. The characteristics of old age mentioned in his poetic work were therefore at odds with his reputed personal experience. A comparison between Solon's literary writings and his personal values show that one has to be cautious when attempting to explain concepts of ageing solely from literary topoi.

Ambiguity between literary topos and personal experience can also be found in Aristotle's work. In *Rhetoric* (which was written in order that an orator could adapt his speeches to the nature and age of his audience), Aristotle gave a whole range of qualities, which he saw as characteristic for his three given age groups – namely, youth, adulthood and old age. Aristotle's views on the mental traits of the old will be further discussed in [Chapter 4](#), but what is of importance here is that Aristotle saw the mind as most fully developed at the age of 49, suggesting that after this age one can expect only intellectual regression.⁵ As he saw the body at its strongest at the ages 30–35, he, like Solon, saw body and mind declining at a different rate. It is of note that Aristotle wrote his *Rhetoric* when he was about 54 years old, and I think it highly unlikely that when he was writing his work he saw the beginnings of an intellectual decline in himself. Furthermore, in *Problems* (in a chapter entitled 'Thought, Intelligence and Wisdom'), Aristotle noted that a man's perception and understanding increase as he gets older. Here, Aristotle saw the mind at its best in old age, as we learn from experience. The mind was seen as the instrument of the soul; the longer we use the instrument, the better we get to know it.⁶ It is not certain that all of *Problems* was written by Aristotle himself, but the principles of this chapter are not at odds with views expressed elsewhere, as, for example, in *Politics*, where Aristotle believed that the state should be governed by the old and the wise, while the young should be warriors.⁷

The representations of the course of life, therefore, do not necessarily reflect the author's own experience, or indeed, represent a physiological or a social reality. The characteristics given to each age group in the 'ages of life' are likely to have expressed commonly held views, conforming to the stereotypical views society had of the various age groups, which were often dependent on physical valour and man's social usefulness. The divisions of the life-course suggested only a broad pattern of the intellectual ability of the elderly and little or no attention was paid to any distinguishing traits of individual old men.

A decline of the intellect, in line with the body

An extreme view of an intellectual decline over the life-course can be found in the work of the Epicurean Lucretius. In *De Rerum Natura*, written in order to prove the corporality of the soul, Lucretius argued that the mind did not operate independently from the body; he believed that the mind grows with

the body and ages with it. In ageing, therefore, body and intellect would deteriorate simultaneously:

Moreover, we are aware that the mind is born with the body, develops with it, and declines with it. A toddling child possesses a feeble intellect that matches the weakness and delicacy of his body. Then, when maturity is attained and strength is robust, judgement and mental power are correspondingly more fully developed. Later, when the body is shaken by the mighty strength of time and the frame droops with forces dulled, the intellect halts, the tongue dotes, the mind staggers; everything fades and fails at once. So it is natural to infer that the substance of the soul too is all dissolved, like smoke, into the breezy air aloft, since we observe that it is born with the body, develops with it, and, as I have shown, succumbs with it to the stress and strain of age.⁸

Lucretius thought that mind and body were inseparably linked: they suffered together (as in certain illnesses), aged together and died together. In death, the mind is dissolved, worn out with age or disease, just like the body (3.458–463). Lucretius saw the mind (*animus*) and the soul (*anima*) as identical in structure, but having different functions. The soul deals with emotions; the mind deals with rational thinking and is responsible for intelligence (3.421–424). He believed the mind was just as much a distinct physical part of the body as other bodily parts, such as ears and eyes, and was firmly fixed somewhere in the middle of the breast.⁹ As ageing of the body is a biological fact, the mind, just like ears and eyes, would deteriorate too. He did not consider that parts of the body might deteriorate at a different rate.

Lucretius' argument was conceived in order to prove the mortality of the soul and thereby free us from the fear of death. Fear of death (fear of punishment and the uncertainty of what would happen to the soul after death) was a common subject in the philosophical texts.¹⁰ Fear of death was especially urgent in old age, as death would not be far away, and Musonius (first century AD Stoic) thought fear of death more than anything else terrified and oppressed the aged.¹¹ The philosophers thought fear of death could be overcome by reason and should be prepared for in youth, as, they argued, death was not exclusive to old age. Cicero believed that old age was rather late to start worrying about death. He saw the old man who had not yet come to terms with death as wretched.¹²

Lucretius' theory, with its emphasis on the corporality of the intellect, seems to have gone the farthest among the doctrines which linked intellectual decline to a deterioration of the body, but fragments from two other Epicureans, Metrodorus and Philodemus, indicate a similar approach.¹³ Lucretius' beliefs may not have been wholly Epicurean, however. Epicurus, Lucretius' mentor, does not appear to have subscribed to the doctrine of a

parallel decline of mind and body. He saw the old man as still capable of learning; he wrote: 'Let no one when young delay to study philosophy, nor when he is old grow weary of his study. For no one can come too early or too late to secure the health of his soul.'¹⁴ His words were borne out by personal experience. Epicurus was able to continue his philosophical discussions right into old age (he reached the age of 71) – even when he was said to be in extreme physical pain.¹⁵ Epicurus saw old age as a happy period – happier than youth, which he saw as an unstable time. He believed that in old age, man had come to anchor in a safe harbour and could reflect on what had been learned earlier in life.¹⁶ Another example of an Epicurean who did not see a decline of the intellect in old age can be found in Diogenes of Oenoanda (c. second century AD).¹⁷

We only have Lucretius' treatise extant in full, but fragments and comments from other authors suggest that the question of whether or not the mind rose and declined in line with the body was, throughout antiquity, a common theme of philosophical debate. In favour of a simultaneous decline was Empedocles, fifth century BC, whose tiny fragment, 'For man's wisdom grows according to what is present', points in this direction. Aristotle later noted that Empedocles believed that the mind is governed by the state of the body. Against were Prudentius ('old age, better in counsel, but feeble in energy, declines in body though its mind is cleared'), and Saint Augustine who believed in a metaphorical growth of the soul.¹⁸

These philosophical debates were abstract. Lucretius, for example, did not consider what implications a simultaneous decline of mind and body would have on society. But, taking his doctrine to the letter, there would have been no role in society for the old man, either in public or in private life, as both body and mind would have been in some form of decline. A hint of this can be found in the work of Herodotus, a contemporary of Empedocles. In the context of urging the Persian king Darius to take action when he was still young and capable, and win new dominions and power for the Persians (with the implication that when he was old he would have lost the courage and the capability to do so), Herodotus wrote: 'for as a man's mind grows with his body's growth, so as the body ages the mind too grows older and duller for all uses'.¹⁹

An intellectual decline at the very end of the life-course

In this section, I will consider two other writers who categorised the course of life into stages and who saw a difference between elderly age (*senectus*) and old age (*senium*). The first, Ptolemy, was a second-century AD astronomer, mathematician and geographer; the second, Isidore of Seville, was a much later writer of an etymological encyclopaedia (seventh century AD). Isidore is rather late in the period, but he is of interest as he was a great borrower: his writings reflected many of the thoughts and ideas from antiquity, as well as

those from his own time.²⁰ As pointed out by Powell, in early Latin (before the age of Cicero) *senium* simply meant weariness. Later usage showed strong connotations of decline and decay, but only in Silver Latin was the word '*senium*' used in the meaning of old age.²¹ It was therefore not until the first or second century AD that we find the division of old age into two stages in some of the classifications of the life-course.²² In these classifications *senium* is the very last stage of the life-course, characterised by the literal meaning of *senium*: senility; dotage; physical, intellectual and mental decay.

Ptolemy divided the life-course into seven stages, these being controlled by the seven planets.²³ As an astronomer, Ptolemy saw a correspondence between the planets and the ages of man. He thought that the immortal soul, trapped in the body, would be of the same essence as the spirit diffused throughout the universe; therefore man would be affected by the movements of the planets.²⁴ Accordingly, the planets exerted a controlling influence on the stages of men and determined their character. The planets were thought to have heating, moistening, cooling and drying powers, which influenced men's disposition.²⁵ This knowledge was used in the casting of horoscopes; as an astrologer, Ptolemy had to take age into account in his prognostications. In *Tetrabiblos* (6.10) he wrote:

so with regard to the divisions of time, it is essential to consider the different qualities of the several stages of life, and to pre-determine the appropriate fitness of every age to such events as may be expected.

Ptolemy's stages of life depended on physical maturity and corresponded to social responsibilities. The ages and the disposition of man were in accordance with the nature of their ruling planet. Some planets were seen as good (Jupiter and Venus), some as evil (Mars and Saturn), while others were seen as neutral.²⁶ Old age was given two stages: elderly age (*senectus*) and old age (*senium*), governed respectively by Jupiter and Saturn. In astrology, the planet Jupiter, spanning the ages 56–68, was thought to be well-natured, hot and wet, and provided the person with dignity and guidance; the planet was associated with peace and tranquillity (*Tetr.* 4.10.26):

Jupiter, taking as his lot the elderly age . . . brings about the renunciation of manual labour, toil, turmoil, and dangerous activity, and in their place brings such as decorum, foresight, retirement, together with all-embracing deliberation, admonition, and consolation; now especially he brings men to set store by honour, praise and independence, accompanied by modesty and dignity.

Senectus was therefore thought to bring many good things, in spite of loss of physical strength, and Ptolemy saw, in these early stages of old age, an

intellectual maturity and wisdom. It is of interest that Ptolemy saw the previous stage in life (what he terms the age of manhood) as a period of crisis, in which it was realised that life was passing by and that there was not much time left to achieve objectives; similar, perhaps, to the idea of a 'mid-life crisis' noted in contemporary society.

The planet Saturn was thought to govern the final stage of life, old age proper (from age 68 onwards). This planet was thought to be sombre in character and was associated with melancholy.²⁷ Saturn was far removed from the Sun and seen as cold and dry, like the old man who took his condition from this planet. The cooling process was thought to have a negative effect on both mind and body (*Tetr.* 4.10.207):

Finally, to Saturn falls as his lot old age, the latest period, which lasts for the rest of life. Now the movements both of body and of soul are cooled and impeded in their impulses, enjoyments, desires and speed; for the natural decline supervenes upon life, which has become worn down with age, dispirited, weak, easily offended, and hard to please in all situations, in keeping with the sluggishness of his movements.

Only in the last stage of ageing did Ptolemy see an increasing physical deterioration linked to an intellectual and mental feebleness. This combination of physical and mental deterioration was thought to cause bitterness, a feeling of hopelessness and dissatisfaction with life.

Ptolemy recognised that the characteristics of man within the sphere of the planetary influences provided only a loose framework.²⁸ Ptolemy's division of the life-course was theoretical, but the physical and character traits he attributed to the stages of the life-course were meant for everyday use. Horoscopes played an important part in a Roman's life, and would give advice on a variety of practical issues, such as the right marriage (6.5), the birth of children (6.6), on finding the right friends or avoiding certain enemies (6.7), the best time for travelling (6.8), kind of death (6.9), and so on. Although broad and general, Ptolemy's characteristics of the ages provided value-judgements, probably influenced by man's usefulness to society and his role in public life. His classifications of the life-course therefore give a glimpse into what was thought to be an appropriate way of life for an old man. The first stage of old age was the onset of a man's physical decline and the renunciation of manual labour and dangerous activities (perhaps referring to a cessation of military duties), but Ptolemy also attributed accumulated wisdom (foresight, deliberation, admonition and consolation) to the elderly man; qualities and characteristics which suggest counselling and teaching possibilities. At this stage, an old man could still play an important role in society; only in extreme old age, with both physical and mental impulses impeded, was his role in society diminished and life became a misery.

Isidore, Bishop of Seville in the seventh century AD, wrote a comprehensive compendium on the origins of words and concepts, covering a wide range of subjects. His medical writings incorporated definitions for age terms and a division of the life-course into stages, also giving brief physical and mental characteristics.²⁹ In *Etymologiae*, Isidore recognised six stages of life, with *senectus* as the last stage. This stage, starting from the age of 70, was not bounded by a definite span of years. Isidore divided the stage of *senectus* into two parts, with *senium* as the final stage of old age 'so named because it is the terminus of the sixth age'.³⁰ *Senectus*, the early stage of old age, was said to bring 'some good and some bad' (*bona adfert et mala*):

Good, since it frees us from the most unbridled masters, imposes moderation upon pleasures, checks the onslaught of lust, increases wisdom and imparts riper counsel. Bad also, because the greatest curse of the elderly is weakness and tedium, for 'Disease and sad old age draw nigh' [a quotation from Vergil, *Georgics* 3.67]. There are two things by which the bodily faculties are depleted, old age and illness.³¹

Like Ptolemy, Isidore did not see an intellectual decline in early old age. It is of note that he assigned the age of 70 as the start of old age, an age many other writers saw as a time of total physical and mental misery. He only saw an intellectual and mental decline in the final stages of old age (*senium*), but made no clear distinction as to when the stage of *senectus* ended and *senium* began. *Senium* was seen as a prelude to death. Isidore made several correlations between the term '*senium*' and images of death (*mortuus*, *funus*, *cadaver*). He stressed the 'defunct' status of the very old man; at this stage, he has finished the duties of life and is retired from his post.³² In advanced old age there is nothing left for the old man but to wait for death, and Isidore ends with his burial (*sepultus*). In modern English vocabulary, the correlation between extreme old age and death is also noted in expressions such as 'one foot in the grave' (also the title of a TV sitcom in the 1990s).

As the title of his work '*Etymologiae*' implies, Isidore, a grammarian, was interested in the origin of words and his purpose for writing was educational. His comments show sensitivity, but he did not express any new ideas. That the sexual passions of the young impeded wisdom will be considered in [Chapter 6](#), and Isidore's observation – that the very old man's self-centred concentration on physical miseries obstructs rational thinking – can be found, for instance, both in the writings of Seneca and in those of Maximianus, who flourished in the sixth century AD. The latter wrote:

It [the mind] rises to meet no demand, with the body weakens,
Is stupefied, concentrating on its ills.³³

So both Ptolemy and Isidore saw the first stage of old age as a period when a man's understanding of life was at its greatest and an old man could therefore be useful to society through teaching and counselling duties. But eventually the time would come when physical decline would subdue the intellect. In practical terms, only at the latter stage was an old man seen as useless and as a burden to society. For Ptolemy, the old man then turned tiresome, with many negative mental characteristics; Isidore also noted the tediousness of physical and mental decline to the old man himself. The division of old age into two stages has recently become more common. Neugarten, for example, speaks of the 'Young Old' and the 'Old Old', and Laslett, in his study of the Third Age (ages 50–74, which he sees as an era of personal fulfilment and personal development) suggests the introduction of a Fourth Age, an era of final dependence, decrepitude and death.³⁴

Decline in memory

Time robs us all, even of memory.

Vergil, *Eclogues* 9.51

It was realised in antiquity that memory declines when one gets older. The decline was seen as part and parcel of the physiological degenerative process of ageing.³⁵ Lactantius (a third–fourth century AD Christian apologist) saw memory loss as just as much part of old age as enfeebled limbs or hardness of hearing; Seneca believed that memory was the first part of the mind to be assaulted in old age, as memory was the most fragile.³⁶

In a society which placed great emphasis on the spoken word, memory was important. The elder Pliny called memory a boon 'most necessary for life'. To have a good memory was a topic of conversation and people with good memories were admired. Many professions revolved round a good memory, such as oratory and augury.³⁷ The memory of the old was relied upon to maintain the social mores and to instruct the young in occupational skills. Decline of memory in ageing could therefore be a serious encumbrance for someone in public life, and loss of memory would probably entail a decline in status. Some old men can be seen to have refused to accept a decline in memory, which could cause public embarrassment or shame. Quintilian has the example of his tutor, the orator and advocate Domitius Afer, whose oratory in his prime was admired, but Afer continued to give speeches well into old age when his memory was said to have declined. Quintilian thought he went on too long and became an embarrassment to himself and to others.³⁸ Jerome remarked on the loss of memory and mental collapse of Messala Corvinus, a well-known statesman, general, orator and poet. Yet, in his younger years, Corvinus' oratory was praised by Cicero and Quintilian for its elegance and judgement.³⁹

Loss of memory in old age was used as a topos in poetry and drama, where

it was treated as a personal nuisance and one of the encumbrances of old age one had to put up with. Vergil described how two elderly rustics longed for the words of songs they had known in the past but had now forgotten; they hankered after times past, when they were still young and their memory still keen (*Ecl.* 9.51).

Not all believed that memory would necessarily decline in old age; some thought that memory loss could be avoided, or at least be kept at bay, by constant use and the practice of special mnemonic techniques.⁴⁰ Simonides, the sixth–fifth century BC Greek poet, was attributed with developing the first memory system and he accredited himself with a great memory when he was aged 80.⁴¹ Seneca, the rhetorician, was well known for his prodigious memory. In his old age, he recollected – from memory – many speeches which he had heard earlier in life, which were collected in ten books of *Controversiae*; yet in his preface he said that he was out of practice and complained his memory was undermined by age and a long period of idleness. Seneca suffered from false modesty here, but of interest is his awareness that the combination of age and lack of practice caused rustiness.⁴² His nephew, the younger Seneca, has the aged Oedipus complain that his memory was failing through weakness and long disuse (*Oed.* 818). That sloth brought forgetfulness was a commonly accepted concept and was a subject of debate in the rhetorical schools. The elder Seneca, in his *Controversiae*, has Lato say: ‘Do you not see how a torch unbrandished is dim, but when shaken it gives out fires? Men are softened by leisure, iron is eaten away by disuse and takes on rust. Sloth brings forgetfulness.’ The metaphor that memory was like a lamp that grows dim with time, unless it was supplied with oil, was a common one and was also used by Cicero.⁴³

Cicero believed that men who keep their minds active will not lose their memories.⁴⁴ He made an example of those men who were still active in society, such as lawyers, pontiffs, augurs and philosophers, and argued that the old remembered everything that interested them. His message was clear: keep memory and mind alive by using them. In contemporary society, a great deal of research has gone into the ‘use it or lose it’ principle, and is still ongoing. Diamond, a psychologist who researched into the activities of the brain of people in old age, wrote: ‘I found that people who use their brains don’t lose them. It is that simple.’⁴⁵ Circa two thousand years earlier, Cicero remarked that forgetfulness in old age was only for ‘the weak of mind, the drowsy and the slothful’ (*Sen.* 11.36). Cicero made Cato, his mouthpiece in *De Senectute*, recollect what he called his ‘intellectual gymnastics’: every evening he ran over in his mind everything that he had said, heard or done during the day, a habit he regarded as ‘Pythagorean’.⁴⁶ He also trained his memory by reading the names of the dead on tombstones and refreshed his memory by his recollection of them. Cato boasted that, at his age (he was in his eighty-fourth year), he could not only remember the people who were living but also could recall the names of their fathers and grandfathers.⁴⁷

At Rome, the remembering of proper names seems to have been of some importance; references can be found to people with an excellent memory for proper names, and their ability is remarked upon.⁴⁸ It is perhaps not surprising that Cicero referred to Cato's mnemonic exercises in order to remember people's names, a habit which Cicero presumably knew about, and which he practised himself. We learn from Plutarch that when Cicero started out in public life he not only trained himself to memorise names but also to know in what part of the city every important person lived, where they had their country houses, who were their friends and who their neighbours. We are told that whatever road in Italy Cicero travelled, it was easy for him to name and point out the estates and villas of his friends, which obviously gave him prestige and helped him in his political life.⁴⁹ Numerous examples can be found of those who had a great memory for proper names. Cicero named Themistocles, an Athenian statesman, who remained active in political life until his death aged around 65. Themistocles was said to have learned the names of all the citizens of Athens by ear; a skill, Cicero argued, he would not have lost in old age.⁵⁰

Seneca, the rhetorician, probably from his own experience, realised that proper names especially are more difficult to remember in old age; he boasted that he could reel off 2,000 names in the same order as he heard them, *before he grew old*.⁵¹ Modern research has shown that memory for names particularly declines in ageing.⁵² The forgetting of proper names in old age would have been seen as a social handicap in ancient Rome, as the remembering of proper names could enhance one's prestige and political standing; it follows that the old, who were often affected by a diminishing memory, were at a disadvantage.

Seneca may also have experienced what modern neurologists call 'impaired short-term memory' (memory of things that have been deposited a long time past are more easily recalled in old age than if they happened recently).⁵³ Seneca wrote: 'Whatever I entrusted to it [to memory] as a boy or young man, it brings out again without hesitation as though new and just heard. But things I have deposited with it these last years it has lost so entirely that even if they are repeatedly dinned into me, I hear them each time as new.' Seneca noted that recall is not always immediate, but occurs at a later stage, either when more relaxed and happy, but at other times also when the mind is occupied with serious business.⁵⁴ Seneca, therefore, known for his prodigious memory, contributed some acute observations on memory in ageing, a number likely to have come from his own experience.

Culturally, attitudes to loss of memory must have been very different than at present. In a society with such great emphasis on the spoken word, a decline of memory would have been much more serious and perhaps more obvious than it is today. In the competitive political environment of the Roman upper classes, where even the remembering of someone's proper name could mean the enhancement of social prestige, a decrease in verbal

recollection would have been a serious encumbrance. That it was taken seriously by some can be seen from the suicide of Democritus, the fifth–fourth century BC Greek atomist, who reputedly lived to the age of 103, who is said to have starved himself to death when his memory began to fail.⁵⁵

Senility

But worse than all bodily ills
Is the senescent mind. Men forget what their own servants
Are called, they can't recognise yesterday's host at dinner,
Or finally, the children they begot and brought up.⁵⁶

Juvenal 10.232–235

Juvenal's words demonstrate that the concept of senility was known to the Romans; references to what we now know as dementia, of which Alzheimer's disease is the most common form and symptoms of this disease (feebleness, a confused mind, forgetfulness, the losing of one's wits, foolishness, a return to childhood) can be commonly found in the ancient world in a variety of different texts and contexts.⁵⁷ By examining some examples from different categories of literary texts I aim to come to an understanding of what senility meant at Rome, in terms of images and fears, as well as of practical matters. Galen recognised dementia as a defect of the old man's physiological constitution. He noted that many people lose their wits at the height of old age, because this period is cold and dry. (He saw therefore a difference between early old age and extreme old age.) He saw coldness as a quality which could damage the activities of the soul, impairing proper understanding.⁵⁸ In the medical section of his etymological encyclopaedia, Isidore of Seville expressed a similar concept. Under the term '*senes*', Isidore wrote:

The aged are thought by some to have been named from a diminution of sense, because through advanced age, men act foolishly. For physicians say that fools are men of colder blood, wise men of hot: hence, old men, in whom the blood has become cold, and children, in whom it has not yet become warm, have less wisdom. It is in this that old age and infancy are alike: old men lose their wits from advanced age, children do not know what they are about because of playfulness and immaturity.⁵⁹

His 'physician' may well have been Galen, whose doctrines were still widely read in early medieval times. As Isidore's text showed, old age was sometimes referred to as a second childhood; neither children nor old men showed much sense; the old were no longer able to use their intellect; the young had not yet learned to develop reasoning qualities.⁶⁰ Both were seen as behaving foolishly. The notion of old age as a second childhood (*bis pueri senis*) may

have been a proverb and can be found in a variety of literary writings. It was used in comedy and satire in order to ridicule the old man who acted in a puerile fashion – for instance, an old man who went wenching, who gambled or got drunk.⁶¹

It can also be found in a dictum attributed to Cato: ‘Flout not old age while thou dost sense possess;/ Age brings to all some childishness.’⁶² This saying does not mirror Cato’s own experience; it must have reflected common sentiments, part of a broader, shared culture and used, perhaps, in order to gain popularity.⁶³ Cato himself remained fully *compos mentis* until his death, aged 85; he was politically active right up to the end and wrote most of his own prose and many of his speeches in extreme old age. Cicero, in *De Senectute*, made Cato say: ‘Old men retain their mental faculties, provided their interest and application continues . . . Senile debility is only characteristic of the weak-willed and not of all old men.’⁶⁴ These latter words seem to typify what we know of Cato’s character, and if his dictum was indeed written by Cato himself (it is doubtful whether the sayings collected under the title *Dicta Catonis* were actually Cato’s own work) we may have another example of a mismatch between what some authors wrote and how they personally experienced their ageing process.

Impairment of the mind was greatly feared. Many Romans habitually wished each other ‘good mental and physical health’.⁶⁵ It was taken especially seriously in the moralistic texts.⁶⁶ Here, a man’s ability to reason was seen as fundamental to a human being – it was the main quality which set him apart from the creatures of the animal world. An unsound mind was seen as an impediment to the soul. In spite of the emphasis that an active life keeps the mind alive – as discussed above – it was realised that a decline of the mind in old age was not always fully under one’s own control. If it became impossible to live a satisfactory moral life – through a loss of proper understanding and judgement – suicide was seen as a way out.

The Roman attitude to suicide has already been considered in the previous chapter (in connection with geriatric diseases), so two examples, one from Seneca and one from Marcus Aurelius, should suffice here. Both men were intellectuals interested in Stoicism. Seneca wrote:

that I shall not abandon old age, if old age preserves me intact for myself, and intact as regards the better part of myself; but if old age begins to shatter my mind, and to pull its various faculties to pieces, if it leaves me, not life, but only the breath of life, I shall rush out of a house that is crumbling and tottering.

And from Marcus Aurelius comes:

We ought to take into account not only the fact that day by day life is being spent and a smaller balance remaining, but this further point

also that, should we live longer, it is at least doubtful whether the intellect will hereafter be the same, still sufficient to comprehend events and the speculation which contributes to the understanding alike of things divine and human. For, if the mind begins to decay, there will be no failure of functions like transpiration, nutrition, sense-impression, and desire; but the right employment of ourselves, precision in regard to the related elements of duty, analysis of the indications of sense, to know just whether the time is come to take leave of life, and all questions of the kind which specially require a trained judgement – these are extinguished before the rest.⁶⁷

It is of note that Seneca would consider suicide if body, or mind, were in serious decline, but that Marcus Aurelius only considered suicide if his faculties to reason no longer functioned. (That Aurelius may have committed suicide because of a combination of a depressed mind and a distressed body was contemplated in [Chapter 2](#).) But both men worried about *when* to take leave of life, as a senile man would no longer be able to make a reasoned decision to take his own life. A sensible and measured decision would have been in line with their Stoic beliefs, Seneca believed it would be better to go too soon than too late and run the risk of living life in wretchedness. Seneca and Marcus Aurelius were, respectively, in old age (late sixties) and late-middle age (mid-fifties) when they wrote their reflections; this is the age, according to Laslett, when people begin to worry about the encumbrances of old age.⁶⁸ Perhaps they recognised a decline of the mind as a not too distant future threat. The fear that one can no longer make any sensible decisions, nor make arrangements to take leave of life (in countries where this is a legal possibility), is also a modern worry and the subject of Ian McEwan's novel *Amsterdam* (1998). After they saw one of their friends suffer from the dreadful humiliation of a mental collapse, the two protagonists made a pact to help each other to facilitate euthanasia, a pact which went dreadfully wrong.

Both Seneca and Marcus Aurelius were clearly concerned about the possibility of a decline of the mind, but we have, however, few instances of old men who took their own lives because their mental faculties were impaired. Maybe this is because fewer men actually suffered from dementia, as Juvenal – usually so pessimistic on old age – noted: ‘some old men survive into old age with their wit intact’.⁶⁹ However, a few instances can be found. From Lucretius came the earlier mentioned example of Democritus, who starved himself to death when his memory failed, and Messala Corvinus, the rhetor – who was said to have lost his memory to such an extent that he, according to Pliny, even forgot his own name – committed suicide when a cancer grew on his sacrum, in his seventy-second year. Perhaps the additional burden of an incurable physical disease made life no longer tolerable.⁷⁰ No cure for Alzheimer's disease has been found at the time of writing, and we find in today's society similar expressions of the fear of mental decline. Freud, in his

mid-fifties, wrote: 'What would one do if ideas failed or words refused to come? It is impossible not to shudder at the thought.'⁷¹

In private life, loss of mental faculties could have major practical consequences. A senile old man would, for example, no longer be able to look after his affairs. In Athens, according to Solon's laws, a man could no longer bequeath his property to whomever he wished if his judgement was influenced by old age, and a law seems to have existed by which a son could bring a lawsuit against a father suffering from insanity in order to stop him squandering away his fortune.⁷² An account from ancient Athens – probably fictitious – relates that Sophocles' son accused his father of being incapable of managing his business affairs because of his *paranoia*. Sophocles, aged 90, refuted the charge by reciting some verses from *Oedipus at Colonus*, enquiring of the jury 'does that play seem to be the work of an idiot?' This incident was often repeated in Roman texts, especially by those who did not believe in intellectual decline in old age.⁷³

Cicero hinted at a similar law at Rome, whereby it was customary to restrain heads of families from wasting their estates, but no details are known.⁷⁴ At Rome, the *paterfamilias* remained head of the family and was in full control of all economic and social matters as long as he lived, so it was doubly important here for an old man to be mentally fit. (The role of the *paterfamilias* will be discussed in [Chapter 8](#).) If the head of the family was negligent in looking after his business affairs, Roman law had a procedure of *interdictio bonorum*, which did not involve an action in law. The formula pronounced by the praetor can be found in Paul's *Sententiae* (3.4a.7). A similar procedure (from the Twelve Tables) existed in case of mismanagement of affairs through insanity (*cura furiosi*), which said if someone is mad, a *furiosus* should no longer be allowed to look after his property. Control of his affairs was then traditionally taken over by the nearest agnate and members of the gens, or, if these were not available, by a suitable *curator*.⁷⁵ The lawyers used the term '*furor*' here, which does not specifically refer to mental disability in old age; but, as Parkin points out, the same action could be taken by the relatives of those who suffered from senile dementia as those who suffered from (temporary or permanent) insanity.⁷⁶

In practice, however, it was likely that the handing over of affairs would have happened amicably without the need for any court action. For example, the brother of Licinius Lucullus was said to have taken over the affairs of Lucullus' property, when he suffered from insanity in old age.⁷⁷ From public life comes the example of Publius Licinius Calvus, tribune of the soldiers (396 BC), who retired voluntarily, introducing his son, when he found that his own body had decayed, his memory had failed and his vigour of mind was impaired.⁷⁸

Dementia is a progressive disease, which gradually reduces the ability to think. A problem could therefore occur, if (especially in the early stages of dementia) an old man was unable to accept his impediment and refused to

relinquish his responsibilities. An example from public life might be Marius, who, according to Posidonius – when he was elected consul for the seventh time, at the age of 70 – was said to have been worn out by his sufferings and was ‘somewhat deranged and verging on senility’.⁷⁹ Yet he did not give up his position of power, thinking that he had not yet completed his ambitions. In this, he was criticised by Plutarch, who saw Marius as worn out and feeble in old age and hinted that his faculties had failed.⁸⁰ The matter was solved by his death 17 days after his seventh consulship.

According to Tacitus, in his will Fulcinus Trio accused Tiberius of mental decrepitude in old age (*fluxa senio mens*) because Tiberius had not stopped his policy of avenging half-proven or forgotten crimes three years after the execution of Sejanus.⁸¹ Fulcinus Trio (an informer who had been accused and handed over for trial) may well have made his accusation out of rancour, but it is now recognised by modern medical science that Alzheimer’s disease can cause a change in personality and behaviour, or emphasise latent characteristics (these can include emotional instability and increased sexual needs).⁸² These were exactly the symptoms Tiberius was accused of in old age by Tacitus and Suetonius. The former implied that Tiberius underwent a character change in old age, and his (reputed) sexual deviations were well documented by Suetonius.⁸³ There is, however, apart from Fulcinus’ accusation, no clear indication in the ancient texts that Tiberius, who died in the course of his seventy-eighth year, suffered from dementia, but this cannot, I think, be entirely ruled out.

It is therefore evident from a variety of sources that the concept of senile dementia was known in Rome. To suffer from dementia could have practical problems, which appear to have been solved – most commonly – within the family. The threat of a mental decline was particularly feared by the intellectuals because life without the faculty to reason was not worth living. The old with symptoms of dementia were seen as foolish and marginal figures, as they no longer contributed to society. As Plautus (*Bacch.* 820–821) wrote (on a *senex amator*):

Whom the gods hold dear dies young, with strength and sense and mind intact. If any god loved him, he should have died more than ten years ago or more than twenty. He walks a bane upon the earth: no mind, no sense, as useful as a rotten mushroom.

NEGATIVE MENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

This chapter aims to continue to build up what we would now call a ‘psychological portrait’ of the old man in Rome. Questions asked include: how did the ancient Romans think character was formed and developed over the course of life? Did they believe personality changed – due, perhaps, to physical, social and cultural influences – or did innate temperament play a more important part? Which particular personality traits were thought to be typical of old age? Can we determine whether the characteristics assigned to old age were stereotypes or were they based on representations of real life?

On those who saw a change in mental characteristics over the course of life

Classification of the human life-course into stages can be an aid to our understanding of the course of life. Both Greek and Roman literary texts show various instances of different systems of age divisions. The age grades were mainly determined by biological criteria, but some divisions also took social and cultural factors into consideration. From these divisions it can be seen that it was believed life was continually changing; the course of life was seen as an evolution. Men – women were usually not mentioned in this context – would pass through several phases of life and each phase of life was given distinct physical, mental, and – at times – also behavioural characteristics. Men were expected to live according to the laws of the life-phase in which they found themselves. Based on its own specific physiology, it was thought that each stage in life had its own distinctive and unique personality traits. In *De Senectute* (10.33), Cicero wrote:

Life's race course is fixed . . . each stage of existence has been allotted its own appropriate quality; the weakness of childhood, impetuosity of youth, the seriousness of middle life and the maturity of old age, each bears some of Nature's fruit, which must be garnered in its own season.

The Roman literary texts give many variations in the divisions of the life-course; they show no agreement on the number of stages, nor on the criteria on which these stages were based. But these divisions had one thing in common – namely, that the pattern of human development was seen as harmonious and according to the laws of nature. Character and behaviour were thought to change over the course of life as a result of biological forces, the mental traits assigned to the old being generally characterised by decay as the condition of the body declined in old age. Consequently, old age was given many negative mental characteristics. (Some doctrines attributed wisdom and experience to old age; these theories put much emphasis on men's ability to overcome any innate negative character traits, a subject considered in the next chapter.)

As shown before, the cooling of the body was thought to cause physical and mental deterioration. Old men, therefore, were believed to lack vitality, this making them morose and timid. Horace, for example, blamed various negative mental characteristics on the chilliness of the old man's body. In a poem characterising the 'Ages of Man', Horace depicted four stages in life: the child, the youth, the man and the old man, each with distinct and unique characteristics conditioned by their physical state. He saw the qualities of life on an ascending scale, reaching their peak in adulthood and declining thereafter: 'many blessings do the advancing years bring with them; many, as they retire, they take away'.¹ The traits given to the young were more positive than those given to old age. Their bodies were youthful and strong, so they were seen as highly spirited and optimistic. However, they were also seen as impulsive. In middle age, man was physically at his strongest and by this time he had learned to control his emotions, but he was also wealth-seeking and ambitious. The traits of the old, whose bodies were feeble, were seen as the most negative; they were depicted as peevish, quarrelsome and surly. In Horace's poem, old age was to be dreaded:

Many ills encompass an old man, whether
because he seeks gain, and then miserably holds aloof from
his store and fears to use it, because, in all that he does, he
lacks fire and courage, is dilatory and slow to form hopes, is
sluggish and greedy of a longer life, peevish, surly, given to
praising the days he spent as a boy, and to reproving and
condemning the young.²

The personality traits of the old were often compared to those of the young, usually unfavourably; this appears to have been so over the ages. Shakespeare, for example, wrote 'Youth is hot and bold, age is weak and cold; Youth is wild, and age is tame' ('The Passionate Pilgrim', XII, lines 7–8).

Horace's 'Ages of Man' had a practical application. We are told in the introduction that a poet or dramatist had to be aware of his audience; he

therefore had to have a knowledge of the characters and manners of each age so that each age segment of the audience could be approached in the appropriate manner.³ As a result, Horace's stages of life reflected universal and stereotypical characteristics, and in this particular poem he did not acknowledge individual, intrinsic personality traits. As shown before, the poets did not always depict their own experience or personality in their poetry. Horace, for example, acknowledged individuality elsewhere. For example, in one of his *Epistles* he wrote: 'Men have not all the same tastes . . . their tastes vary.'⁴ In his 'Ages of Man' Horace may have catered to common stereotypical views that society held on the personality of the old.

Many of the stereotypical characteristics given to the old were negative; these characteristics were likely to have been quite common, as they appear in a number of different texts and contexts. Horace based his judgement on the characteristics of each age primarily on physiological criteria, and he did not consider any redeeming mental and intellectual qualities old age might bring, such as wisdom or a better understanding. Horace also gave more mental characteristics to the old than to any other age group, as was noted by Colmant.⁵ Colmant did not give a reason for this, but it may have been because of their extreme physical constitution (both body and mind were thought to be deteriorating), or because the old, by living long, had more time and reasons to develop personality faults, as was suggested by Aristotle.

Horace's characteristics of the old were very similar to those in Aristotle's interpretation of the 'Ages of Man', which work – like Horace's – was written in order to appeal to a specific audience, adapting to their nature and their years.⁶ Aristotle saw three stages of life, youth, middle age and old age, which he correlated to growth, stasis and decline. Aristotle's characteristics are intriguing because of their detail and because of the biological, social and psychological reasons he gives for the supposed negative mental traits of the old; it will therefore be useful to quote almost in full the major characteristics he gave to old age (*Rhet.* 2.13):

Older men and those who have passed their prime have in most cases characters opposite to those of the young. For, owing to their having lived many years and having been more often deceived by others or made more mistakes themselves, and since most human things turn out badly, they are positive about nothing, and in everything they show an excessive lack of energy. They always 'think', but 'know' nothing and in their hesitation they always add 'perhaps', or 'maybe'; all their statements are of this kind, never unqualified. They are malicious; for malice consists in looking upon the worse side of everything. Further, they are always suspicious owing to mistrust and mistrustful owing to experience . . . And they are little-minded, because they have been humbled by life . . . They are not generous, for property is one of these necessities, and at the same time, they

know from experience how hard it is to get and how easy to lose. And they are cowardly and inclined to anticipate evil, for their state of mind is the opposite of that of the young; they are chilled, whereas the young are hot, so that old age paves the way for cowardice, for fear is a kind of chill . . . And they are unduly selfish, for this is also littleness of the mind . . . And they are little given to hope owing to their experience, for things that happen are mostly bad and at all events generally turn out for the worse, and also owing to their cowardice. They live in memory rather than in hope; for the life that remained to them is short . . . hope belongs to the future, memory to the past. This is the reason of their loquacity; for they are incessantly talking of the past . . . Their outbursts of anger are violent, but feeble; of their desires some have ceased, others are weak . . . the old are querulous, and neither witty nor fond of laughter . . .

It is of interest that Aristotle saw the ages in life and types of human character as not only dependent on physiological factors but also on the fortunes of life – what modern psychologists call environmental and social circumstances. Throughout his diatribe, Aristotle emphasised that the personality traits of the old were unpleasant. Firstly, because the old had little physical and mental strength left; secondly, because the character of the old man was affected by life itself, which was often disappointing and treated people badly. Aristotle contrasted the character of the old with that of the young; neither were seen as perfect, both had emotions and attributes in excess. Aristotle saw middle age as the prime age, when both body and mind were at their strongest; the middle-aged were therefore given the best characterisation, the mean between the other two, without the excesses.⁷

How did Aristotle and Horace come to their interpretation of the 'Ages of Man'? By looking in some detail at the pessimistic personality traits given to the old – in a variety of different texts and contexts – it should be possible to determine why so many negative characteristics were attributed to old age and how firmly these alleged personality traits of the old were accepted in society. Were these characteristics based on commonly accepted stereotypes or on representations of individuals in real life?

Pessimism

Pessimism was conventionally considered a dominant characteristic of the old. The cause of the old man's pessimism was usually seen as biological; it was thought to be induced by the coolness of the body, which affected both body and mind in a negative way.⁸ Galen, for example, argued that it is not the number of years that make old men depressed and harsh, but his bodily mixture. An anonymous author of the treatise *On the Constitution of the Universe and of Man* saw a predominance of phlegm as the cause of the old

man's pessimism (and also his forgetfulness).⁹ The old, therefore, could not help their pessimism. Poetically, old age was symbolised by winter, the cold and sombre season, the season of dying.¹⁰ Additionally, Aristotle gave external, social explanations for the old man's pessimistic character, as discussed below. He believed that many other negative traits of the old emerged from the old man's (alleged) despondency. Cicero, too, saw external – in his case political – reasons as an explanation for pessimism in old age. When concerned about the political situation in 49 BC (when Pompey's legates were opposing Caesar, and were returning home after their defeat in Spain), he wrote: 'I remember how despairingly old men talked when I was young. I am doing as they did [he was then aged about 57] and indulging in the weakness of old age' (*ad Fam.* 2.16.6).

Quarrelsomeness and irritability

Quarrelsomeness was repeatedly mentioned as a personality trait of the old.¹¹ The stresses of life were most commonly seen as the cause of irritability in old age, but it was also thought that the ability to cope with life's frustrations could be affected by weakness of the body. We have already seen how Aristotle believed the old to be querulous because they thought they were on the point of suffering all kinds of misfortunes. Even Plato and Cicero, whose philosophical writings were in defence of old age, admitted that some old men could be irritable and quarrelsome because of neglect or slights (real, or imagined) by friends and kinsmen (modern psychologists see this as a stigmatisation process).¹² Plato has the elderly Cephalus remark to Socrates:

Men of my age flock together and at our meeting the tale of my acquaintance commonly is, I cannot eat, I cannot drink; the pleasures of youth and love are fled. Some complain of the slights that are put upon them by relatives, and they will tell you sadly of how many evils their old age is the cause.¹³

Plato argued here that what is often seen as a fault of old age in general was really an innate individual character fault, because some old men are mostly cheerful. Cicero, too, saw irritability as an intrinsic character fault and not as an inevitable fault of age. Cicero, however, conceded that there might be some mitigating circumstances why some old men were cantankerous. He believed that they imagined themselves 'ignored, despised and mocked at' and suggested that when the body is weak even the lightest blow gives pain. That weakness of the body could make people irritable was also noted by Seneca, who wrote that those who are broken by ill-health and age are more irascible than others.¹⁴ Worn down with age, the old were seen as easily offended and hard to please; they showed an adverse reaction to the vagaries of life. But Cicero thought these mitigating circumstances for irritability in

old age only a slight excuse and not really a sufficient one, since an old man should be able to overcome the irritations of life through self-control and strength of character.

Even though he thought it was avoidable, Cicero confessed to feeling irritable himself in old age. Privately, in a letter to his friend Atticus, he professed that he was getting increasingly cantankerous in old age and added that he ought to read his own *Cato Maior* to counteract this.¹⁵ Cicero therefore admitted that he did not always live up to the high moral standards he set out in his *De Senectute*. He wrote in his introduction, dedicated to Atticus, that he meant his work to be a *consolatio* to lighten the common burden of old age and to counteract its annoyances.¹⁶ Cicero's increasing irritability in old age may have been caused by a troubled private and public life. His much beloved daughter Tullia had died the year before he wrote *De Senectute* and he was much grieved by her death. Furthermore, in May 44 BC (the date of Cicero's letter to Atticus) Cicero had fears for the Republic and for his own position. He was clearly feeling old and disillusioned; he wrote: 'I have had my time. Let the young men worry.'¹⁷ Augustus is another example of someone who implied that old age induced cantankerousness. In an address in order to promote marriage, he reputedly said:

Is there anything more admirable than a wife . . . [who] can share with you the pleasures of health and tend you in sickness, be your partner in good fortune and comfort you in bad, moderate the mad-cap nature of youth and soften the crabbed severity of old age?¹⁸

He was then 72 years of age.

The irascible old man was also a stock type in Roman comedy.¹⁹ The '*senex iratus*' was frustrated by life itself, by the feeling which Aristotle described as 'most human things turn out badly' (*Rhet.* 2.13.1–2). The angry old men in comedy felt themselves provoked by the behaviour of their irresponsible sons, or were made grumpy by their nagging wives; some were bamboozled by their cunning slaves; others were frustrated because they were, in old age, no longer thought of as lovers. These larger than life and stereotypical characterisations could not have been created without the existence of real role models. The irascible old man is still a popular stereotype in comedy and popular TV sitcoms. In the mid-1990s, Victor Meldrew in *One Foot in the Grave* became an almost proverbial cantankerous old man. A sour temper could have adverse repercussions on the old man himself. Aristotle thought old people did not make friends easily, as nobody cared to be with someone who is continuously disagreeable, while Musonius wrote that a cheerful old man would win praise from others, and would therefore be able to live happily and in honour.²⁰

It can therefore be demonstrated that society commonly saw the old as irritable and quarrelsome. These traits were thought to be caused by a

combination of societal pressures and a weakness of the body; as Cicero suggested, weakness of the body made little irritations seem large.

Loquaciousness

The old, it was thought, were often very loquacious.²¹ They had a penchant for talking about the past and a fondness for boasting. Garrulity was one of the few faults of old age Cicero acknowledged in his *De Senectute* when he wrote: 'Old age is naturally inclined to talk too much, and this I say in order not to acquit it of every fault.'²² Cicero was somewhat disingenuous here, as he did not really consider having good conversations as a fault. For example, he had Cato admit to an increased eagerness for conversation (*sermo*) in old age, which was seen as a blessing. Cato was said to enjoy the afternoon banquets, where he indulged in modest eating and drinking and where he would talk to his friends.²³ As was mentioned previously (Chapter 2), having good conversations with friends was generally thought to be a suitable and pleasurable pastime for the elderly. Conversation, it was believed, would aid both body and mind; it accelerated breathing, warmed the cold body of age and kept the mind keen. Pliny, for example, admired his elderly friend Spurinna whose conversations with friends formed part of his daily routine.²⁴

In old age, wisdom and experience of life could make some old men interesting to listen to, as was noted, among others, by Clement of Alexandria.²⁵ Loquaciousness was therefore not always considered a fault. However, distinction was made between idle chatting (*loquax*) and having a serious conversation (*sermo*).²⁶ Cato and Spurinna, and the like, were thought to have serious conversations, while some old men, such as the old men in comedy, were seen as chatterers.²⁷ Prattling was generally seen as a womanly quality, and elderly women in Roman comedy were often portrayed as talkative old gossips who let their tongues run away with them. Gleason noted that Plutarch did not use the basic Greek term *legein* (conversation) to characterise a woman's speech, but instead used the term *lalein* (chatter), the word he also used for idle men, whom he accused of 'womanliness'.²⁸

Old people were said to be fond of talking about 'the good old days' and to be critical of present-day manners. This was seen as an annoying habit, especially by the young. This still appears to be true in contemporary society. Aiken wrote: 'Younger adults see the old as irritable, quarrelsome, and crotchety fuddydiddies who live in the past.'²⁹ Aristotle observed that the old found pleasure in talking about the past because they were disenchanted with present life, and Horace's words suggest that the old were seen as rigid in their attitude to life, refusing to move along with the times.³⁰ The habit of old people to talk about the past can be found as a topos in the fictional literary writings. A detailed example of a moaning old man appeared in Maximianus' elegy on old age:

He [the old man] praises the past, despises the present years,
 Thinks only that is right wherein he's wise
 That only he's wise, he grows more foolish still.
 He talks much, though you hate it, and repeats it,
 Then trembles and abandons what he said.
 His listener's gone but he keeps right on talking:
 Brave oldsters, brave in babbling alone!
 He fills the air with clamouring in vain
 Nothing's enough; he shrinks from what once pleased him.
 He laughs with those who mock him and, applauding
 Himself, grows happier in his very shame.³¹

Maximianus mocked the babbling old man, but at the same time drew attention to the old man's desperation to be listened to, his need to assert his own identity and still be someone of importance. Loquaciousness was an expression of the old man's self-esteem.

But talking about the past could be considered a virtue, if the stories were uplifting and had inspiring and instructive qualities, since the young could learn from the experiences of the old. Pliny depicted an idyllic portrait of his country estate in Tuscany, where old people – grandfathers and great-grandfathers – entertained the younger generations, including Pliny himself, who said that he delighted in their stories, imagining himself transported to a bygone age.³² These stories were not only entertaining but also taught the young about history and what happened in the past. Holmes noted that, especially in traditional societies, the elderly often enjoy great respect and prestige because of their ability to remember as the memories of the aged are depended on to provide traditional skills, to instruct young people and to maintain the social mores.³³ In the Roman sources, this was borne out, for example, in Quintilian's observation that an elderly orator could receive much prestige by teaching his experiences and knowledge to the young.³⁴ Telling stories about the past might therefore have enhanced the elderly's confidence and standing in society, reaffirming their identity.

To talk about one's experiences and deeds of the past could quickly shift to boasting, however. Plutarch believed the old to have a morbid craving for glory and a liking for the exaggeration of their deeds of prowess. We are told that they were in the habit of criticising others, while they themselves would have been, in the same circumstances, pillars of wisdom.³⁵ It is not difficult to find reasons in the ancient texts for the elderly's habit of boasting. Public influence and standing were highly rated in Roman society; Cicero, for example, saw *auctoritas* as the highest form of glory in old age.³⁶ So it is no wonder the elderly were thought to be boastful about deeds past, at an age when they were unlikely to perform famous deeds in the present or in the future. In medieval times, Chaucer noted: 'for whan we may not doon, than wol we speke' ('Prologue', *The Reeve's Tale* 3879). Old men may have boasted,

because otherwise they would have been overlooked or neglected, as can, for example, be learned from Maximianus' elegy, cited above. Old people who could no longer be active on the political scene were held in contempt, as we are told by Juncus, second century AD.³⁷

The ancients seem to have distinguished between 'empty' boasting (based on idle talk) and 'rightful' boasting (based on true actions). Plutarch believed (idle) self-praise to be offensive, but thought if the self-praise of an old man was deserved he must have licence to speak and be listened to.³⁸ This, he suggested, would benefit both old and young; it would give the old prestige and self-esteem and teach the young that the old, too, were once young and capable of great deeds, which would teach respect and tolerance. So-called 'rightful' boasting by the old appears therefore to have been tolerated in Roman society. One of the best-known fictional boasters of antiquity was the old Nestor, who was shown by Homer to be full of self-importance. Yet, he was depicted as wise; he expected to be listened to and for his advice to be heeded, as was due to his experience and age.³⁹ Cicero, through the mouth of Cato, particularly emphasised that he did not consider Nestor's claims of his own merits as excessive or loquacious, as they were reputedly based on past experience and actions.⁴⁰ It is perhaps not surprising that Cato, through Cicero, did not consider rightful self-praise as a fault; both Cato and Cicero had a reputation of being fond of boasting themselves, as was pointed out by Powell.⁴¹

It can be established that loquaciousness was seen as a common trait in old age. It was realised that talking would reaffirm the old man's personal identity, and could establish the old man's sense of self-worth and satisfy his need for public respect. It could also encourage a sense of belonging. Plato, for instance, has the old Cephalus remark that old men flock together for a 'good old natter'.⁴² It is noteworthy that the motivations for loquaciousness identified at Rome are in accord with the research findings of Abraham Maslow, the psychologist who saw affiliation and self-esteem as the driving motivations (along with security) for the behaviour of individuals in the twentieth century.⁴³ The ancients may have understood the reasons for an old man's talkativeness, but no patience was shown for babblers, idle braggarts or complaining old grouches; these were nevertheless commonly found character types in old age, both in fiction and in representations of real life, which suggests that the talkative, grumbling old man was a familiar figure.

Avariciousness

The old were often seen as avaricious; old misers, as a type, have appeared over the ages and in different cultures.⁴⁴ Notably, many misers are from periods before the advent of social security and welfare, when the building up of a nest-egg for old age may have been a social necessity. (It is of note that security was also a key driver in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, as mentioned

above.) This was, however, not always appreciated in the ancient sources, generally representative of the wealthy elite, in which avariciousness, with its resulting penny-pinching and close-fistedness, was deplored. Satire was particularly scathing about avariciousness.⁴⁵ Wealthy Romans were expected to be generous and to give gifts to their family and friends or to the common good (from gifts of food or money to the citizens and the financing of games to the building of public monuments). A maxim, attributed to Cato, said: 'When riches abound thee, in extreme old age, see that you are bountiful, not niggardly towards your friends.'⁴⁶ Hoarding in old age was seen as useless, as you could not take your money with you. Cicero wrote: 'As for avarice in the old, what purpose it can serve I do not understand, for can anything be more absurd in the traveller than to increase his luggage as he nears his journey's end.' This must have been a pervasive sentiment, as variations can be found as a topos in the more popular literary sources. The epigrammist Antiphanes wrote: 'There is no point in reaching grey old age without the taste of wine, love, sweet ointment and flowers,/All you leave is a great and wealthy testament.'⁴⁷

Aristotle noted that the old were not generous because they knew how hard it was to get property and how easy it was to lose.⁴⁸ In Rome, too, property was by no means secure for life, especially in turbulent times such as the late Republic, with its civil wars and proscriptions, or during the reigns of the so-called 'bad' emperors. The Romans were well aware of how much more difficult old age was without riches, and some evidence of fear of financial insecurity in old age can be observed.⁴⁹ Although this was not always explicitly stated, there are hints in the Roman texts that miserliness or greed in old age could be caused by emotional or economic insecurity. This might have been the case with Tiberius. According to Suetonius, Tiberius had the reputation of being stingy, which turned to rapacity in later years.⁵⁰ Suetonius gave many examples of Tiberius' greed. For instance, he allegedly forced the wealthy Lentulus, *amicus* of Augustus, to name him as his sole heir and then drove him to commit suicide; he also made many states and individuals forfeit their ancient mineral rights and the privilege of collecting taxes.⁵¹ In Suetonius' portrayal, Tiberius displayed an extraordinary need for amassing wealth in old age; he gave the impression that Tiberius had always been avaricious (meanness was, therefore, an intrinsic character trait), but that this quality became more pronounced in old age. Suetonius did not give explicit reasons for Tiberius' increasing meanness in old age, but, given his personal and political background, an emotional insecurity seems likely.

In the status-conscious ancient world, riches and possessions would have provided esteem and identity, which could have been especially important in old age when authority and status might have been on the decline. Aristotle, for example, mentioned 'security or abundance of possession' among his criteria for 'happiness'.⁵² Simonides (the fifth century BC Greek poet) believed

acquisition of wealth was the only pleasure left in life to the old. When reproached for his avarice in old age, Simonides allegedly replied that since old age had deprived him of all other pleasures, he was comforting his declining years with the only one left, 'the pleasure of gain', as can be learned from Plutarch. Plutarch, as a moralist, deplored this attitude and emphasised the pleasure and public honour an old man would gain from generosity to the good of the community.⁵³

It can be determined, then, that the old were frequently seen as avaricious; comedy and satire especially feature numerous old misers. Not many explicit reasons were given for miserliness in old age, but a lack of financial security and self-esteem in old age can be identified from inferences. Aristotle, for instance, noted that miserliness appeared to be caused by old age and disability of any kind.⁵⁴ Named miserly individuals included Tiberius, whose innate meanness was thought to have been exacerbated in old age by lack of security and a need for honour and esteem. Certain intrinsic character traits could therefore become more pronounced in old age – in this case through cultural and social circumstances. In the ancient world, with its emphasis on generosity to one's friends, family and the common good, avariciousness was seen as a serious folly, or shortcoming.

Cowardice

The old were often thought of as being cowardly. In the ancient literary sources, courage was commonly associated with physical strength and military vigour, which would naturally exclude the elderly.⁵⁵ Valerius Flaccus, for instance, equated cowardice with old age when he addressed his soldiers with the words: 'What shameful old age has seized you on a sudden, and broken your valour and taken away your fire.'⁵⁶ Aristotle believed that the elderly lacked physical courage because fear is a kind of chill.⁵⁷ The coldness of the old man's body was thought to make him slow, sluggish and cowardly. In contrast, the young, whose blood was hot, were seen as courageous, but also over-confident and rash. Horace, for instance, associated the slowing down of the body with a slowing down of the spirit; he saw the old as timid and less inclined to take risks than the young.⁵⁸

An interesting incident, in a specific representation of real life, illustrates this generalisation very well. It involved Q. Fabius Maximus, consul and leader of the senate, and Scipio Africanus during the Second Punic War, third century BC. Fabius Maximus was then aged about 72 and Scipio Africanus about 31. Scipio proposed to go to Africa in order to try and defeat Hannibal, but Fabius Maximus advised caution, believing that taking the war to Africa would pose unnecessary dangers; he demanded the replacement of Scipio. The elderly Fabius Maximus was depicted as prudent and cautious and the young Scipio as bold and rash. From Livy, we learn that the older members of the senate especially had more confidence in the wisdom and caution of the

experienced and elderly Fabius than in the boldness and courage of the young Scipio.⁵⁹ Age, therefore, had faith in age.

From Plutarch, we see the same incident from a different perspective. Here, we are told that many saw Fabius as a malicious and doddering old man, whose old age had robbed him utterly of courage, and that he was accused of lack of foresight and want of confidence. It is of note, however, that Plutarch's account could have been coloured by his dislike of ambition in old age.⁶⁰ In the end, the opinion of both sides proved legitimate. Scipio did eventually go to Africa and defeated Hannibal at Carthage in 203 BC, bringing the war to an end, but it was Fabius' cautious strategy which made victory possible; as Valerius Maximus wrote: 'The one overwhelmed Carthage by his speed, the other by his delay saw to it that Rome could not be overwhelmed.'⁶¹ The dilemma, whether the command of the army should go to a young man, like Scipio, who would fight bravely, or to an older man, like Fabius Maximus, who would do nothing rash, became a subject of debate in rhetorical schools.⁶² It was not the first time that Fabius' prudence had clashed with the hot-headedness of youth. Minucius, Fabius' young Master of the Horse, opposed to Fabius' policy at Rome, thought Fabius showed a lack of courage and a false humility of age. The senate gave Minucius equal *imperium* to Fabius. In this incident, Minucius had to be rescued by Fabius when his hot-headedness enticed him into a rash battle.⁶³

Cicero is among the few who suggested that old age could actually reinforce courage. He argued that in old age one never knew how long one's term would last. This, he believed, would make an old man bolder and more courageous. He described Solon's act of courage in his confrontation with the tyrant Pisistratus, who is said to have asked Solon, 'Pray, what do you rely upon in opposing me so boldly?', to which Solon allegedly replied, 'Old age'.⁶⁴ Plutarch referred to the same incident, but he saw Solon's words as those of a courageous man, whose audacity had not decreased in old age, suggesting therefore that some characteristics transcended age. He used the same criterion for Appius Claudius when he, as a blind and frail old man, had himself carried to the senate in order to urge them not to propose a truce with Pyrrhus after Rome's defeat. In defence of the accusation that old men lacked courage, Plutarch argued that in times of crisis old men could still be aroused and show plenty of courage, in spite of their lack of physical fire.⁶⁵ Plutarch, who believed that it was the old man's duty to be useful to his country, accused old men of cowardliness only if they shirked public responsibility.⁶⁶

It was therefore believed that the old lacked courage because their physical constitution slowed down their spirit as well as their body; they were seen as timid and not inclined to take risks.⁶⁷ This was generally seen as a fault of old age, but it was also realised that caution could, at times, be politic and that it took the experience of the old to be able to recommend a prudent approach. Others, such as Cicero and Plutarch, did not accept that men lacked courage

in old age; Cicero argued that old age actually encouraged audacity, while Plutarch saw courage as an intrinsic characteristic which would not diminish in ageing.

So from a variety of sources – such as the texts dividing the course of life into stages, moralistic and fictional literary writings, and representations of real life – it can be established that many thought that different ages showed different personality traits. Old age was associated with certain behavioural characteristics (such as pessimism, irritability, talkativeness, miserliness, prudence, and so on) which had not been demonstrated in earlier years. These traits were generally thought to be caused by an internal, physiological deterioration (affecting the mind as well as the body), but it was also realised that outside influences, such as environmental and social conditions, played an important part. Weakness of the body and the vagaries of life were thought to have a negative effect on the old man's behaviour and attitude to life. But the characteristics of old age given in many of these texts – especially those concerning the divisions of the life-course, comedy and satire – were very generalised and did not take individuality or intrinsic character into consideration. By looking in some detail into the negative characteristics most frequently assigned to old age, it can be established that many writers *were* conscious of individuality and innate character and that it was also believed that man's own faculty of self-control could affect his disposition.

On those who also saw a continuity in character over the course of life

Cicero, who wrote, as quoted above, that life's racecourse was fixed and that each stage of life had been allotted its own appropriate quality, was also aware of the importance of a man's own unique identity and intrinsic character, in his words: 'as it is not every wine, so it is not every disposition, that grows sour with age'. He emphasised man's own ability to influence and control his character and behaviour, and argued that good habits and education (by which he meant the practising of philosophical virtues, such as self-control) could overcome innate character faults and other miseries (physical and mental) which could come with old age. When he admitted that some old men were 'morose, troubled, fretful, and hard to please' he argued that old age itself could not be blamed for these feeble attributes, but that these characteristics must already have been inherent in youth; however, he conceded that old age could exacerbate these faults.⁶⁸ Cicero realised that a special effort had to be made in order to adapt to the constitution of the stage of life one found oneself in (in old age, this meant maturity), and he saw those old men who were mentally feeble as neglectful old men.

Seneca, too, believed in the general concept of change over the course of

life, but, as I would argue, he also believed in some form of permanence and intrinsic character. In *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* (121.15–16), he wrote:

each age has its own constitution, different in the case of the child, the boy and the old man; they are all adapted to the constitution wherein they find themselves . . . the periods of infancy, boyhood, youth, and old age, are different; but I, who have been infant, boy and youth, am still the same. Thus, although each has at different times a different constitution, the adaptation of each to its constitution is the same.

So, in looking back over his life, Seneca, in his late sixties, saw both change and continuity. He believed that he had adapted, in the appropriate manner, to the different constitution of each physical and mental phase in life; according to the biological laws of nature, both his body and his mind had grown and developed.⁶⁹ But at the same time, Seneca appears to believe in his own innate character, the way he personally adapted to the different stages of life had not changed; so in his view the boy would have within him the seed of the youth, the adult, the old man. In ageing, therefore, Seneca, like Cicero, recognised a change in behaviour through a physical, emotional and mental development, but he was also conscious of a continuity and a sense of agelessness. The supposed change over the course of life was therefore not seen as being as straightforward as it at first appears, and some writers (such as Cicero and Seneca) believed that although certain behavioural changes do occur over the course of life, the innate self could not be utterly changed by ageing and old age. Plutarch, too, gave examples of innate characteristics which had transcended old age.⁷⁰

In contemporary western societies, psychologists frequently deliberate whether intrinsic character changes or is constant over the course of life, and the subject constitutes something of a controversy.⁷¹ This is a contrast to antiquity, where suggestions of continuity were few and where emphasis was much more on change rather than permanence. Many of today's investigators are impressed with the stability of character through adulthood to old age, especially by those researchers who were able to employ longitudinal research, and also by many of the aged themselves, who, on being interviewed, tended to emphasise a continuation of their identity – rather like Seneca.⁷² The author J.B. Priestley, when asked at the age of 79 what it felt like to be old, was said to have replied:

It is as if . . . as a fairly young man, I was suddenly kidnapped, rushed into a theatre and made to don the grey hair, the wrinkles and the other attributes of age, then wheeled on stage. Behind the appearance of age I am the same person, with the same thoughts as when I was younger.⁷³

Some modern researchers see both a continuity and a change in personality over the course of life, and suggest that the qualities shown by the elderly were established early in life but became more pronounced in response to the stresses of later life; this is not dissimilar to Cicero's argument (who suggested that in old age, innate character traits could become more pronounced by imagined slights or anxiety about physical deterioration).⁷⁴ Other modern researchers see a more distinct difference in personality over the course of life, changes which were believed to be caused by physical, social and environmental conditions, such as ill-health, altered physical appearance, retirement, economic situation or death of loved ones – a view which shows similarities to Aristotle's impact on personality by the experiences of life itself.⁷⁵ However, not many of today's researchers see a change of personality as being due to just biological causes (a physiological deterioration of the body), as was found in many sources from antiquity (for example in Horace's views on the 'Ages of Man' and in some of the Roman scientific writings).⁷⁶

Conclusions

Many in the ancient world were conscious of an age-distinctiveness which saw various stages in life, each with its own unique character and behaviour pattern, based on its own physiology. The coldness of the old man's body was thought to affect the old man's spirit, resulting in a physical and mental sluggishness, feebleness and a general dissatisfaction with life; a dissatisfaction which was aided by environmental and social circumstances. But innate character was not ignored and some writers saw both continuity and change over the course of life. Accepting that the different stages of life had their own distinct characteristics, they also believed that ageing could not utterly destroy certain intrinsic qualities and that in the right kind of man (with the right attitude to life), positive innate characteristics could transcend old age. Some also believed that self-control and strength of character could overcome many negative intrinsic character traits.

It was found that the negative images were deeply ingrained in society and even some of the elderly themselves admitted to being guilty of some of the alleged qualities assigned to old age. Negative character traits were often seen as part of the inevitable process of ageing. A casual remark by one of Terence's characters suggested that the faults of the old were not as easily excused as those of the young. From the mouth of a *senex*: 'I am now of an age when a fault cannot expect forgiveness, and so I habitually employ such caution as may avoid a rash act.' (It is also of note that this old man was eager to conform to the behaviour expected of him.) Perhaps the faults of the old were not so easily forgiven because they were expected to be in control of their emotions and be an example to the young.⁷⁷

It appears that in Britain, and in many other contemporary western cultures, negative personality traits are still stereotypically assigned to the old,

similar to those found in the ancient sources. From collected interviews, Thompson (1990) came up with the following image of the old:

Old people think and move slowly. They are not creative and can't learn, change or grow. They dislike innovation and new ideas. They enter a second childhood and are egocentric. They become irritable and cantankerous, yet shallow and enfeebled. They live in the past behind times. Their minds wander and they reminisce. They are often stricken with disease (sic) which restrict their movements. They have lost and cannot replace friends, spouse, job status, power, influence and income. They have lost their desire and capacity for sex. Feeble, uninteresting, they await death, a slow burden to society, their families, themselves.⁷⁸

Modern research methods are able to investigate the elderly's reaction to the negative stereotypes of old age and it was found that the majority of the elderly thought the negative portrayals as inaccurate; they were rejected with some resentment, or taken as possibly applying to other people.⁷⁹ Unfortunately, this type of research is not possible for those who study ancient societies, but the reaction of the long-dead old is unlikely to have been very different.

WISDOM AND EXPERIENCE

The philosophical and moralistic doctrines

The preceding two chapters concentrated on those precepts which were based on the belief that both body and mind were affected by ageing. Not all ancient philosophical doctrines, however, accepted that the intellect would necessarily suffer in old age. Some texts acknowledged an unavoidable physiological decline, but did not point to mental deterioration as inevitable in ageing. Old age could be seen as a period when accumulated experience brought increased wisdom and good judgement. This would, inevitably, have practical applications for the old. It implies they could still make a positive contribution to society; the old man's experience and wisdom could, for example, be used for teaching and counselling purposes. Old age could be a positive period, both for the old man himself and for society.

But, and this was frequently emphasised, wisdom did not come automatically to the old; as Seneca wrote: 'Wisdom comes haphazard to no man' (*Ep.* 76.6). Not all old men were therefore wise men. It was believed that wisdom had to be cultivated by the study of the philosophical virtues and nourished by correct behaviour. Christian texts similarly underlined the need for religious reflection and living according to the Laws of God. Among the pagan texts, Cicero's was probably the most explicit. He wrote: 'Undoubtedly . . . the most suitable defences of old age are the principles and practice of the virtues, which, if cultivated in every period of life, bring forth wonderful fruits at the end of a long and busy career.'¹

Although wisdom in the contemplative philosophical sense (*sapientia*) was known, the Romans were generally emphatically practical and the study of philosophy was dominated by the study of moral duties. It was believed that wisdom was demonstrated by a man's good conduct and good sense. Wisdom was manifested by prudence (*prudentia*) and proper judgement (*consilium*).² This required years of self-training and judicious absorbing of experience, and wisdom was therefore frequently associated with age. Wisdom required self-control, a quality which did not come automatically but needed years of practice. The young, therefore, were not usually thought of as wise; rather,

they were seen as rash and impulsive, incapable of self-control. As Cicero phrased it: 'Rashness is the product of the budding-time of youth, prudence of the harvest-time of age' (*Sen.* 6.20).

There was no agreement or clear delineation of the age at which wisdom would begin. Aristotle attributed judgement, understanding, prudence and intelligence to maturity; while some saw the age of forty as the age at which wisdom and good judgement would start.³ But, more often, old age was specifically seen as the time when one had gained the right experience in order to show proper understanding. Cicero wrote, for instance: 'for there is assuredly nothing dearer to a man than wisdom, and though age takes away all else, it undoubtedly brings us that'. For Plutarch, too, wisdom developed late and slowly, and Seneca likewise believed that wisdom was only obtained at the end of life, through trial and error and by learning from one's mistakes.⁴ Similarly, from the Christian writings:

The crown of old men is experience . . . and the hoary head of their countenance is the blossom of large experience . . . wisdom, and discriminating judgements that are hoary with wisdom, attain maturity with time, and by the vigour of long experience give strength to old age, producing grey hairs, the admirable flower of venerable wisdom, conciliating confidence.⁵

With some exceptions therefore (such as the ideal of the '*puer senex*' – a youth with an old head on his/her shoulders), wisdom was traditionally associated with age.⁶ Wisdom benefited society (as will be discussed), but was also beneficial for the old man himself. It was thought that wisdom and correct behaviour would bring influence and respect from others – the 'wonderful fruits' referred to by Cicero.⁷ Additionally, wisdom instilled the right approach to ageing; it was thought that the wise man was able to overcome some of the inevitable burdens of old age. This was especially important in the Stoic philosophy. Musonius Rufus (first century AD), in a chapter entitled 'What is the best viaticum for old age?' argued that a philosophical education would enable an old man to live in harmony with nature and subjugate the problems of old age. Similarly, Seneca declared: 'what happiness, what fair old age awaits him who has studied philosophy during his life'.⁸ Philosophy taught how life should be lived, and it was believed that, knowing the rules of conduct, the wise man would act accordingly. Seneca believed that philosophy would help one to overcome any fears one might harbour, such as fear of old age or fear of death, and repress any negative character traits, such as avarice and anger (which, as shown in the previous chapter, were mental characteristics associated with old age).⁹ He conceded that this was difficult. He emphasised that the study of philosophy took time and practice and that benefits could be reaped only towards the end of one's life. Similarly, Jerome wrote:

Old age . . . if men have trained their youth in honourable accomplishments and day and night have meditated on the Lord's Law, becomes more learned by time, more subtle by experience, more wise by lapse of years and reaps the sweet fruit of its ancient studies.¹⁰

It was therefore thought that a man had a choice. If he lived virtuously, preferably from youth, in accordance with the Laws of Nature or the Laws of God, he would benefit from his lifelong studies and in old age gain wisdom. Old age, therefore, was what you make of it. Old age can be pleasurable, if you know how to approach it.¹¹ This philosophy is found over and over again. From Seneca:

Let us cherish and love old age; for it is full of pleasure *if one knows how to use it*. Fruits are most welcome when almost over; youth is most charming at its close; the last drink delights the toper . . . Each pleasure reserves to the end the greatest delights which it contains. Life is most delightful when it is on the downward slope, *but has not yet reached the abrupt decline*.¹²

Seneca's words represent an ideal, which, I think, he genuinely believed in. But Seneca was also realistic. His last words (printed in italics) showed that he was well aware that no amount of philosophical studies could stop the ravages of time, and we learn from elsewhere that he feared a final inevitable physical, and especially a possible mental, decline.

It was believed, therefore, that the wisdom of age did not come automatically but was only acquired by correct behaviour and the practice of the philosophical virtues. On a purely intellectual level, too, special effort was needed, as the mind was believed to need constant practice in order to remain sharp and in good working order. This subject has already been touched upon in a previous chapter (in connection with a decline of memory in ageing), but I feel it is useful to refer to it again in this context, as it is repeated over and over in the philosophical texts: an idle mind would turn rusty and eventually decline. Musonius wrote 'to relax the mind is to lose it', and Seneca: 'The mind must be exercised both day and night, for it is nourished by moderate labour; and this form of exercise need not be hampered by cold or hot weather, or even by old age.'¹³ A daily regimen of mental exercises was seen as indispensable; old age was no excuse for mental inertia. Furthermore, Cicero (through the mouth of Cato) proposes that when the mind is occupied by the intellect one forgets about bodily aches and pains.¹⁴ This not only suggests that intellectual activities would compensate for the inevitable enfeeblement of the body but also that the power of the mind was seen as more forceful than any bodily annoyances.

Legal and public obligations in old age

Wisdom was not only expedient to the old man himself but was also of use to society, which made practical use of the experience of age. The Roman upper classes had to perform certain public and other duties for the community.¹⁵ These duties, known as civil *munera*, were composed of financial and personal obligations. A financial *munus* could consist of a *patrimonium*, which involved expenses (for example, paying land taxes or property taxes), while personal *munera* were for the defence of the community and involved bodily or mental activities (for example, service as a magistrate, the supervision of the supply of corn or water, upkeep of public roads, supervision of public land, receiving of census assessment, and so on). Women too were liable to the *munera*, but were excluded from those which involved bodily activities (*Dig.* 50.4.3.3 [Ulpian]). The undertaking of *munera* was seen as burdensome, but it seems that in the majority of cases, and especially for those duties involving a *patrimonium*, age was no excuse for exemptions.¹⁶

Old men could, at times, be excused from some specific public duties and functions, mainly those which involved strenuous physical labour, but details for exemptions are few and scattered. Exemptions from these duties appear to be rare, and may have varied over time; dispensation depended on the merit of each case. In some cases, if a man had reached the age of 70 and if he had several living sons, the old man's sons could take over some duties, usually physical duties rather than those involving financial expenses.¹⁷ An old man still mentally capable of fulfilling obligations which required mental application would not normally be exempted from those duties (*Dig.* 50.5.2.7a [Ulpian]). Dispensation did not come automatically; release from a *munus* only lasted for that particular obligation, and appeal for dispensation had to be made every time someone was appointed, even if he had received an exemption on a previous occasion (*Dig.* 50.5.1.1 [Ulpian]). Permission to retire from certain *munera* appears to have come from the emperor himself.¹⁸ Some legal obligations, therefore, had to be fulfilled for the duration of one's life; age was no excuse for dispensation. Only very few exceptions were made, usually only for those aged 70 or over, and generally only for those duties which required physical effort; there were no exemptions for financial obligations and very few for those which required mental effort. Rome therefore had expectations from their elderly, which depended on expedience. Use was made of their taxes, their mental expertise, and, as long as it was feasible, their physical contributions.

There were some legal exemptions from other obligations. At the age of 60, a man was excused from jury service; perhaps it was thought the long days in court would be too much.¹⁹ The over sixties could not serve at the *comitia centuriata*. There may also have been a regulation – or perhaps merely a feeling – that, at the age of 60, a man was debarred from voting, according to an interpretation of an old saying: '*sexagenarii de ponte*'. (In the ancient

texts this saying had a number of different interpretations, but the one that people of over 60 were debarred from voting seems the most likely.²⁰ Military duties had to be performed until the age of 50, or 46, according to Livy (probably according to expedience).²¹ From the days of early Rome, those between 46 and 60 years of age were seen as *seniores* and were likely to be called up in emergencies only.²² Traditionally, it was thought that the old should no longer fight wars. This went back to the time of Romulus, who divided men into two groups according to age; as Ovid wrote: 'the one advised war, the other waged it'.²³ The state therefore made use of the mental expertise of the old, and in times of need active use was also made of experienced aged generals. Examples can be found, for instance, in Aemilius Paullus (see p. 97) and Fabius Maximus (see Chapter 4).

Under the Republic, senators could be summoned to meetings as long as they lived; there was no legal retirement date. Because senatorial attendance was falling off, Augustus reputedly made attendance at the senate by the senators compulsory on two regular meetings each month, for those who were legally required to do so. Augustus may at the same time also have instigated a retirement age for senators.²⁴ No precise details of such a law are known, but both Pliny and [ps] Quintilian made a reference to a law which allowed the old to retire.²⁵ The age when attendance at the senate was no longer required was given as 65 by the elder Seneca (suggesting that a man of 65 was not forced to attend the senate but could continue to do so if he wished) and 60 by the younger Seneca; it may have been lowered to 60 under Claudius, perhaps reflecting the decreased importance of the senate, as was suggested by Mommsen.²⁶ Fronto was said to have been one of the senators who still attended the senate after his retirement date, but appears to have found the lengthy sessions tiresome, as Talbert noted.²⁷ Some concessions to old age were therefore made under the Empire, when senators could legally retire from senatorial meetings. The age at which a senator could retire seems to have depended on what was politically advantageous; it may have been the age of 65 at one time, the age of 60 at another. But it was more generally believed that the old should still contribute to the good of society.

Old men in public life

In what way did the Romans make use of the expertise of the old? It can be seen that Rome traditionally had put faith in age. Livy described how, in the foundation of Rome, Romulus – in his organisation of society – had created a body of a hundred older senators, *senes*, capable of ensuring continuity of policy. The institution of *patria potestas*, too, favoured age.²⁸ The *cursus honorum*, the career path of a Roman senator, stipulated minimum ages for magistrates (which were redefined several times, depending on expedience). Rome, therefore, believed in the value of age; many of the moralistic writings

proposed that the wisdom of age should be of use to the common good and to the good of the state. Cicero wrote:

The old . . . should have their physical labours reduced; their mental activities should be actually increased. They should endeavour too, by means of their counsel and practical wisdom to be of as much service as possible to their friends and to the young, and above all to the state.²⁹

Plutarch too, in his treatise on old age *An Seni Respublica Gerenda Sit*, believed that it was the old man's duty to be of use to society. (It is of interest that both Cicero and Plutarch were old themselves when they wrote their tracts on old age.) The first half of Plutarch's work opposed the argument that an old man should withdraw from civic activities, while the second half examined the ways in which an old man could make practical use of his expertise. In this, Plutarch is very detailed. He advised that old men should relax all physical activities and should take on only light and moderate public services (793a–f). An old man should delegate and not try to do everything himself; he should only take part in important matters and give lesser jobs to the young (793c–f). He therefore saw the old man in charge, but he also believed that an old man should no longer be ambitious. He was, for example, highly critical of Marius, whose ambition in old age he regarded as highly 'unseasonable'.³⁰ This view can be found elsewhere; lack of ambition was seen as advantageous to the old as it gave freedom from envy.³¹ So Cicero and Plutarch – living well over a century apart and in a different political environment, the former under the Republic, the latter under the Empire – agree that although an old man should take it easier physically he should not retire from public life, thus allowing the state to make use of his experience should it desire to do so. Rome admired those old men, who enjoyed longevity in the service of the state; families proudly recorded the fact on the deceased man's gravestone, and the Romans were delighted to count such men among their friends.³² These old men were said to have given their expertise to the common good, but this was not without advantage for the old men themselves since in return they would receive *auctoritas*, which was, according to Cicero, the 'crowning glory of old age'.³³

There is no shortage of examples of old men who played an important part in public life, especially under the Republic. Cato, in Cicero's *De Senectute*, has many examples. Cato himself was a good model and he was for many the epitome of Republican idealism, embodying respect for age and traditional values. Cato was known to have been politically active well into his eighties. According to Valerius Maximus, Cato, in his eighty-sixth year, took part in public affairs with the spirit of a young man.³⁴ Plutarch wrote of him: 'For he did not . . . think age an exemption from the service of the public, but considered that service as his indispensable duty.' Cato was said to have been

proud of his public role in old age and reputedly said that public service was the fairest privilege of the old.³⁵

Among Cato's examples were many well-known statesmen and heroes from the early Republic, including Quintus Maximus, Lucius Paullus, Luscinius Fabricius, Curius Dentatus, Coruncanius, Appius Claudius, Caecilius Metellus, A. Calatinus, L. Decius, V. Corvinus, and several others. The very mention of their names must have meant that they were seen as exceptional old men. Cicero did not give many career details of these illustrious citizens as these would have been known to his readers, but it may be of interest to look briefly at the *curriculum vitae* of a few of Cicero's heroes. Valerius Corvinus reputedly only retired from political life when he was over a hundred years of age (Val. Max. 8.13.1). G. Luscinius Fabricus was consul in 282 and 278 BC, censor in 275; C. Dentatus was consul in 290, 275 and 274 BC and censor in 270; Coruncanius was consul in 280 BC, dictator in 246 BC (of note is the long gap between his consulship and his dictatorship; he must therefore have been in extreme old age at the time of his dictatorship, as was noted by Powell). All three men were said by Cicero to have preserved the state when they were old men by their wisdom and influence.³⁶

Another example, L. Aemilius Paullus Macedonicus (the father of Scipio, one of Cato's fictional interlocutors), was consul for the second time in 168 BC, when he conquered Pydna at the age of 64; his victory ended the Third Macedonian War. From Livy we learn that his soldiers were impressed by his vigour and his age. He wrote:

The men were stirred by the prestige of his office, the fame of the man, and above all by his age, for though he was over 60, he kept assuming functions of men in their prime in undergoing an outstanding amount of toil and danger.³⁷

Aemilius Paullus still took part in active warfare at the age of 64 and put himself in a position of physical danger and hardship, tasks usually associated with much younger men. Old men who still showed valour in warfare were seen as remarkable and were commented on. Cicero has the example of Fabius Maximus: 'Though quite old, he waged war like a young man' (*Sen.* 3.10). Rome, therefore, still put trust in her experienced, older generals in times of need. After his victory at Pydna, Aemilius did not retire from public life; he was censor at the age of 68 (in 164 BC) and was still augur at the time of his death, aged 72.

Appius Claudius Caecus was commonly held up as an archetypal example of someone for whom even extreme old age and blindness were no impediment for doing his duty. When old and blind he persuaded the senate not to accept peace and an alliance with Pyrrhus after the Romans' defeat at Heraclaea in 280 BC.³⁸ According to Plutarch, Appius had already retired from politics – because he was blind and in extreme old age – but when he heard

of the peace proposal he is reported to have ordered his servants to carry him on a litter to the senate house, where his sons and sons-in-law took him up in their arms and brought him inside.³⁹ After this dramatic entrance, Appius, in a passionate speech, was said to have addressed the senate and proposed blocking the peace proposals. Plutarch told of how the senators, out of regard for the man, were said to have kept a respectful silence.⁴⁰ His speech (no longer extant) was, reputedly, remarkably persuasive and was still read in Cicero's days.⁴¹ The senate took Appius' counsel and decided that Pyrrhus and his army must first depart from Italy before talks of friendship and allegiance could begin.⁴² From Frontinus came the suggestion that, on the motion of Appius, the senate reduce the status of the knights and footsoldiers who had been captured by Pyrrhus.⁴³

Appius Claudius had been a distinctive figure in Roman politics and his action crowned an illustrious career. He had been praetor, censor and twice consul; he was known as an able scholar, statesman, jurist, poet and orator. According to Appian, Appius Claudius became blind in old age (perhaps through cataracts).⁴⁴ Neither age nor blindness seem to have been a serious handicap to Appius Claudius; he was said by Ulpian to have taken part in councils of state when blind, and Cicero emphasised that Appius' blindness and old age did not interfere with his private or public duties.⁴⁵ He was an influential public figure who gave his time and experience to the state right into old age. Appius Claudius had therefore earned his respect, and, as shown in the Pyrrhus incident, his opinions as an elderly statesman were highly regarded.

Under the Empire, the power of the senate decreased dramatically and individual senators could not achieve the same eminence as under the Republic, but, nevertheless, some examples can be cited of old men, sometimes even octogenarians, who held important public posts. Many of these men were in advisory positions; some acted as *consiliarius* of the emperor.⁴⁶ The imperial *consilium principis* was a body of leading senators and equites, with the emperor at its head; the council controlled the finances, the army, and foreign policy. Members were known as *amici principis*, and their opinions carried weight. Some old, even very old, men held this position, as, for example, L. Tarius Rufus and Cn. Cornelius Lentulus, *amici* of Augustus. Rufus was *curator aquarum* as a very old man. Lentulus was augur right into old age, and he was – because of his superior age and military experience, as can be learned from Tacitus – *comes* to Drusus in AD 14. He might have been in his sixty-seventh year at the time.⁴⁷

Of interest is one of Juvenal's satires, in which he presents us with 11 members of Domitian's *consilium*, several of them extremely old men, who were called to an emergency meeting because the emperor wanted advice on how to cook an enormous turbot, which had been presented to him.⁴⁸ In Juvenal's satire, even old and respected statesmen were at the beck and call of the emperor's fancy, but we also learn that some men of very advanced old

age were still part of his regular advisory team. One of these was said to be the elderly Q. Vibius Crispus, aged 80.⁴⁹ Juvenal described Crispus as an agreeable old man, who had survived his long career in public life because he played safe and never uttered his own opinions. Juvenal may have been right in that Crispus was under Domitian's sway, but he may have had no choice in order to survive. He was depicted by others as a well-respected old man, wealthy and influential, who survived the reigns of several so-called 'bad emperors'. He appears to have enjoyed public life and its attendant social scene. Born in AD 10, he was *curator aquarum* until the age of 61, and held a proconsulship in Africa between AD 71 and 75; he was three times consul, the last time probably in AD 83, when he would have been 73 years of age. Three times consul was the most to which a *privatus* might aspire under the Empire, as was pointed out by Sherwin-White, and the honour was exceptional.⁵⁰ Quintilian described Crispus as eloquent and witty; he was said to be charming and debonair, with a quick repartee. His eloquence was admired; Statius referred to his speech as '*Nestorei*'.⁵¹ His wit and prudence seem to have ensured his survival in the political limelight, even at a ripe old age. He comes across as a jolly, but ambitious, old man, liked by contemporaries.

A fellow-member of Juvenal's fictional *consilium* was another 80-year-old, Acilius Glabrio. Glabrio came out of retirement under Pertinax and managed to remain in politics under Domitian.⁵² Both old men were satirised by Juvenal for their sycophancy, but they must have been exceptionally able, even wily old men, with their wits about them, to have survived into their eighties in the turbulent political climate of the time; even the much younger and notoriously temperamental Domitian was said to have called for their guidance, therefore trusting the experience of age.

Pliny has several examples of well-respected statesman in advanced old age. Among them is Verginius Rufus, Pliny's much-admired friend and former guardian, who was consul for the third time in AD 97 when he was 83 years of age.⁵³ Verginius had to retire that same year because of ill health. He was said to have suffered from a badly set broken hip and died soon afterwards; Tacitus delivered his funeral oration. Verginius, too, was well-respected; he had an illustrious career right into extreme old age. He was reputedly offered the Principate, when he was aged 55, by the troops after Otho's suicide; he declined. He disappeared from the public eye between AD 70–97, but Nerva had him recalled, offering him his prestigious third consulship.⁵⁴ Wise old men were therefore called for and even brought back from retirement in extreme old age, if their guidance and expertise were needed. It is of interest that Nerva, who was aged himself when proclaimed emperor (as discussed on p. 101), was said to have surrounded himself with elderly statesmen, as can be seen in the choice of Verginius Rufus, Spurinna, Arrius Antoninus, Frontinus and Corellius Rufus.⁵⁵ Age, therefore, appears to have put faith in age.

Other politicians worth mentioning, this time because of their extreme old age, are two nonagenarians: T. Manlius Valens, who held a consulship in AD 96 at the age of 90,⁵⁶ and L. Volusius Saturninus, who was a *praefectus urbi*, a position he had probably held through most of Claudius' reign, until his death at the age of 93 in AD 56. Saturninus was another survivor, who enjoyed the unbroken friendship of several successive emperors, as was noted by Tacitus. Details of his extreme old age and long and illustrious career were proudly recorded on his tombstone.⁵⁷ The *decuriones*, the councillors who ran Roman local government, were also frequently of an advanced old age, as this position was for life. Under Tiberius, Lucius Calpurnius Piso exercised the office until the age of 80.⁵⁸ The *decuriones* were mainly recruited from ex-magistrates, but in the course of time the class became hereditary and nomination to office replaced popular election. Some imperial freedmen, too, if they survived that long under the more temperamental emperors, remained in office until advanced old age. Epaphroditus, Nero's freedman and secretary and minister of petitions (*libellis*) from AD 62 onwards, remained in his post until he was executed by Domitian in AD 95, when he must have been of a ripe old age.⁵⁹

Age proved no barrier to power. Many emperors ruled until they were of extreme old age, and some emperors were chosen when they were already of old age. Emperors, it seems, seldom retired, at least not officially.⁶⁰ The scene was set by the first emperor, Augustus, who remained in office till his death aged 76. According to Seneca, Augustus dreamed of an eventual retirement, but thought he could not attain it in reality. With modern hindsight, he could have handed down his power to his adopted son Tiberius, if he had so desired.⁶¹ His true reasons for not doing so can only be guessed at; perhaps he was influenced by public pressure, perhaps he did not trust Tiberius. Augustus was highly ambitious and may not have wanted to lay down his reign, even when old and feeble. He appears, however, to have made some concessions to his advanced old age: Dio wrote that he no longer visited the senate house when he was 75 years of age, except on rare occasions.⁶² His successor, Tiberius, never officially retired, in spite of hints about an ultimate retirement. In old age, he reigned part-time from Capreae, in Crook's words '*senex et solus*', till his death aged 77. Some scholars, such as Levick, saw Tiberius' retreat to Caprae as a sort of retirement, as he became increasingly more reluctant to take decisions, or even to receive visitors. However, he never officially gave up his reign.⁶³ It seems that for ambitious men, retirement was always some distant idyll in the future, as was noted by Seneca, who wrote: 'You will hear many men say, I will retire in my fiftieth year, I will retire at sixty.'⁶⁴ Other emperors who died still in power at an advanced age were Claudius (assassinated aged 64), Trajan (died aged about 64), Hadrian (died aged 62), Antoninus Pius (died aged 75) and Constantine (died aged 65, or thereabouts), as well as those mentioned below.

Some emperors were chosen when they were already in old age. Galba, for

example, was aged about 72 when he marched on Rome, carried on a litter, as he was said to be old and weak. In spite of this, he was proclaimed emperor by his soldiers; this was later sanctioned by the senate. Vespasian was an illustrious general when he was declared emperor by his troops at the age of 60, which was recognised by the senate. Nerva, an experienced politician and twice consul, was chosen to be emperor well into his sixties, while Pertinax was proclaimed emperor at the age of 66; he was described as '*senex venerabilis*'.⁶⁵ Their appointments were often made in turbulent circumstances – and these men may have been in the right place at the right time – but their appointments were not accidental. At the time of their assignment they were illustrious generals, and/or politicians, who were in a position of leadership and who were trusted by their supporters.

It can be seen, then, that old men could still hold key governmental positions and could still be powerful and influential. This was especially true under the Republic, but even under the Empire the experience of old men was called for and they were consulted in matters of state. Old men were employed in administrative functions and could still be involved in decision-making. So in practical matters, able – perhaps exceptional – old men were seen as useful to society and the state can be seen to have made the most of their experience. The biographer of Severus Alexander, for instance, recorded that under Severus' reign wise old men continued to be fostered; they were frequently called upon in affairs of state for the wisdom and guidance they were believed to be able to impart.⁶⁶ Priestly duties too, such as augury, were often performed by the old or very old (see [Plate 10](#)). Valerius Maximus has the examples of Fabius Maximus, who supported his priestly office of augur for 62 years (having acquired it when already of mature age), and Valerius Corvinus – already an old man when appointed *Pontifex Maximus* – who was said to have taken care of public rituals for 22 years (which also proves that his memory was still keen).⁶⁷

Not all careers were, however, thought to be suited to the aged, especially those which were physically demanding; warfare has already been mentioned. Cicero thought that elderly statesmen should no longer practise at the Bar, which was physically hard and demanding, but that they should become teachers, or jurisconsults. The latter gave legal advice, but did not have to speak in public. Cicero thought this option would give an old man the greater leisure his age entitled him to, but he would still be intellectually active.⁶⁸ However, in his apology for old age, *De Senectute*, Cicero still saw a future for the aged orator and glossed over the physical disadvantages an orator might experience in old age. He conceded that in old age an orator lost some efficiency because of lack of bodily strength, but he argued that the voice in old age would improve and acquire a 'magnificent resonance'. He has Cato declare that there was still an audience for an eloquent aged orator, whose style of speech should be 'sedate and mild', suited to his age. Cato is known to have delivered speeches right up to his death, aged 85, so Cicero



Plate 10 High priest. His wrinkled face and scraggy neck show signs of great age. Aphrodisias, Turkey.

was not merely idealising when he saw aged orators as still capable of public speaking. Cato's speeches can, however, hardly be described as 'sedate and mild'.⁶⁹ His speeches were known for their colourfulness and their often vicious attacks, which did not mellow in old age, as can be learned from

Cato's vigorous speech against Galba only a few months before he died.⁷⁰ Cicero is sure to have been aware of this speech, and his claim for mellowness in old age, in this case at least, therefore did not quite live up to reality.

It was a moot point whether oratory – which depended a great deal on physical qualities, such as a strong voice, good lungs and endurance – was suited to the old. Some (as Cicero in *De Senectute*) thought oratory still appropriate to old age – older orators would have more experience – while others (for example Quintilian) thought oratory was physically too exhausting and that it would be better for an older orator to retire from public speaking. As mentioned, interpreting or teaching the law were thought to be acceptable alternatives. An example of the former is Livius Drusus, who took up interpreting civil law when his physical strength and his eyesight were failing. An example of the latter was Isaeus, who, according to Pliny, became a sought-after teacher at the age of 60.⁷¹ It is of interest to learn that teaching oratory would not mean a loss of status for the old man. Both Cicero and Quintilian described how older and experienced orators were often surrounded by a crowd of young admirers, eager to learn from them. In other professions, too, many an older man can be seen to have taken a younger man under his wing, passing on his knowledge, experience and also influence.⁷² This is in contrast to our own contemporary society, where it is often felt that the old can teach us nothing.⁷³

Other ageing orators became writers, as Quintilian appears to have done. His *Institutio Oratoria* was published when he was about 60 years of age.⁷⁴ Writing was commonly considered a suitable occupation for the old. It did not require physical exertion and would make use of their experience and wisdom. Numerous elderly Roman upper-class men found pleasure in writing; they are known to have written verses, mimes, epigrams and such.⁷⁵ Among the professionals, many examples of writers can be found (poets, satirists, dramatists, historians, and so on) who were still productive in old age. Cicero mentioned Homer and Hesiod (whose portraiture commonly depicted them as old), Simonides (who boasted that he still taught his poems in his eightieth year), Sophocles (who reputedly wrote *Oedipus at Colonus* in extreme old age), Plato (who wrote *Laws* at the age of about 80) and Isocrates (who wrote *Panathenaicus* at the age of 94). Also mentioned are Gorgias of Leontini (who died reputedly at the age of 107), the lyric poet Stesichorus (who died aged about 80), Naevius (who died aged around 75), Plautus (who died aged approximately 80) and Livius Andronicus (who died aged about 70); all were said to be writing well into old age.⁷⁶

Other names – not mentioned by Cicero – include, to name just a few, Aeschylus, who wrote the *Oresteia* at the age of 67; Euripides, who wrote his *Bacchae* and *Iphigenia* at about 80; Cato, whose *Origines* was written at the age of 66 years and who wrote speeches till his death aged 85; Varro, who wrote *Hebdomades vel de imaginibus* at the age of 77 and the nine books of *Disciplinae* when in his late eighties; Livy, who was still writing at the age of 76;

Juvenal, who wrote several of his satires when into his seventies; the Latin theologian Tertullian, aged 80; St Augustine, aged 76; the fourth century AD poet Ausonius, who was still writing at 83.⁷⁷

Therefore, it can be seen that old men could still have a role in life. Functions for the old were fitted to their physical and mental abilities: their physical duties were reduced, but a greater emphasis was put on intellectual strength and experience. Old men did not have to retire and use was made of the experience of elderly statesmen; some were even recalled from retirement if their expertise was needed. These old men were probably exceptionally fit and mentally able. It must be emphasised that responsibility was not given automatically to the old, it had to be proved by intellectual strength and experience. Many old men appear to have enjoyed the status and authority an official post gave them and were reluctant to relinquish this, as can be learned from an amusing anecdote involving a Sextus Turannius. Turannius was said to be in his ninetieth year when he was released by Gaius from the duties of prefect of the corn supply, a post he had held for 34 years. Turannius, however, did not feel ready to retire, even at the advanced age of 90! He took extreme measures. He reputedly refused to take any food and ordered himself to be laid out on his bed to be mourned by the assembled household as if he were dead. The whole house was said to have bemoaned the enforced leisure of its old master. His tactics paid off and his accustomed work was restored to him, which suggests that extremely aged men were not only respected but also, perhaps, indulged.⁷⁸

At Rome an old man did not have to retire if he had no desire to do so, therefore he was less likely to experience the feeling of disengagement and isolation many of the elderly in contemporary western societies encounter. In today's environment, retirement is usually compulsory and few people of retirement age are still at work.⁷⁹ It appears that almost half the men and women who were interviewed after retirement (in the late 1980s) would have liked to have continued working longer.⁸⁰ Today's society almost invariably attributes a higher status to those in employment, and many old people feel lost without the security of their earlier role. Some anthropologists talk about a 'deculturation', meaning that in retirement the old are compelled to relinquish cherished values and goals and are forced to accept a secondary economic and social role.⁸¹ Furthermore, ageism, when younger people are given preference in work opportunity at the expense of the experience and intellect of the old, is now a considerable problem.⁸² This was a problem that the ancient Romans would seldom have experienced.

On those who believed in retirement

So far I have looked at old men who enjoyed staying in the public limelight, but others were quite happy to withdraw from public life and thought that old age had earned them the right to retire from official duties. They saw old

age as a time they could spend on themselves. Pliny, for instance, wrote: 'It is our duty to give up our youth and manhood to our country, but our last years are our own.'⁸³ This view directly opposes the beliefs of Cicero and Plutarch, who thought it the old man's duty to be of use to society. Today, old age has legal status and most western cultures have a clearly defined retirement date. Distinctions were not so clear cut at Rome. Pliny, writing in his early forties, said he looked forward to his own retirement, but was uncertain what the 'proper' retirement age would be. The Roman work ethic, with its emphasis on public responsibility and duties, appears to have been strong, and an unduly early retirement is seen to have incurred criticism. Pliny wrote:

I wonder when this [retirement] will be permitted me, when shall I reach the honourable age which will allow me to follow your [that of Pomponius Bassus] example of a graceful retirement, when my withdrawal will not be termed laziness but rather a desire for peace?⁸⁴

Another example comes from one of Seneca's letters. His friend Lucilius, procurator of Sicily, was said to be similarly apprehensive about retiring as this might be construed as idleness. We learn that a man who retired prematurely was seen as a 'trifler and sluggard'. Seneca had, at this stage, retired from public life, as by this time he would be entitled to.⁸⁵ He wrote to his friend: 'We have dissipated enough of our time already; let us in old age begin to pack up our baggage. Surely there is nothing in this that men can begrudge us. We have spent our lives on the high seas; let us die in harbour.'⁸⁶

For moralists, such as Seneca, retirement from public duties should not have meant a life of relaxation, since they believed that one should spend this time on the improving of oneself. Idleness and mental inactivity were frowned upon, as they would lead to a decline of the mind. Seneca wrote that he never spent a day in idleness; he even appropriated part of the night for study.⁸⁷ Many of the philosophically inclined, well-educated elite – for instance Cicero, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius – recommended a retirement spent in study and learning. For these men, intellectual pursuit was the highest level of pleasure, and they thought that in old age they would have earned the time for private, individual study.

There were, however, differences in their individual approaches. For example, Cicero was the more utilitarian. Although he eulogised on the pleasure of study and learning in retirement, he believed that knowledge should always be of practical use. Cicero had turned to philosophical writings in the mid-forties BC when his political career was on the wane,⁸⁸ but he continued to put emphasis on public duties, productivity and usefulness, as can be learned from his *De Officiis* especially. It is of interest that Cicero's exemplars of old men who were said to enjoy learning were all of men who were still said to be productive in old age.⁸⁹ Cicero did not believe in

complete retirement from public duties if one was still physically and mentally able. Seneca, on the other hand, favoured a total withdrawal from public life so that he could spend his entire days on studies and other private activities. It appears that Marcus Aurelius had a similar point of view. Writing in his fifties, he gave the impression that he was looking forward to a complete release from public duties in old age. From his *Meditations* we learn that he had a list of books he intended to read in retirement, for which he had, at the time of writing, no time.⁹⁰ Cicero, therefore, put greater emphasis on duty and usefulness than Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, who felt that when they had reached old age they could spend their time, legitimately, on themselves.

Such different reactions to old age were partly due to personal predisposition and ambition, but they must also have been shaped by social and political environment. Under the Republic (Cicero's time), the aristocracy saw themselves as soldiers and statesmen, with political and social responsibilities. We know from his letters that Cicero had been worried about the state of the Republic and his own position in it. Seneca, on the other hand, lived during the early Empire and in a different political climate. His public life at the time of the tempestuous emperors Caligula and Nero was turbulent, to say the least. He must have been glad that he was able to retire, with Nero's permission, in order to devote himself to philosophy, and he had no scruples about withdrawing from the political and moral debasement he found at court. (Seneca could not escape politics altogether and was implicated in a conspiracy against Nero's life and forced to commit suicide.) Marcus Aurelius was part of the age of the Second Sophistic (c. AD 60–230), a period in which much emphasis was placed on the cult of learning, and at this stage it was more acceptable to spend time on the study of philosophy. He, as a Stoic, scorned ambition and looked forward to spending more time on study.⁹¹ These three men, with dissimilar personalities and ambitions – and living in different times under different circumstances – nevertheless saw retirement and old age as the most appropriate time for learning, study and improving the mind.⁹² None of these men even considered the possibility that he would no longer be mentally able to do so.

As learned activities played an important role in the day-to-day life of an educated elderly Roman, it will be worth while to examine more closely the attitude to study specifically in old age. For the intellectual elite, study usually meant the study of philosophy. It was thought that, ideally, one should have started philosophical studies in youth, as it took much time and continuous practice; however, even old age was not seen as too late to take up philosophical studies.⁹³ As Epicurus wrote to Menoeceus: 'Let no one when young delay to study philosophy, nor when he is old grow weary of his study. For no one can come too early or too late to secure the health of his soul.'⁹⁴ Some saw old age as especially advantageous for philosophical explorations. Plato, for instance, considered old age a good time to study as the body had deteriorated and intellectual maturity had been reached. He believed that the

young, whose bodies were strong, should concentrate on physical matters. Seneca thought the old had more experience of life and had more patience for study. Additionally, their minds were no longer distracted by ambition and love affairs.⁹⁵ Old age was therefore seen as the right time to study philosophy – the old had a better aptitude, a better disposition and more leisure time for study.

Philosophical thinking, what would now be called intellectualism, was traditionally associated with age throughout antiquity; this was embodied in the Hellenistic portrait busts of intellectuals – philosophers, poets and orators – which were almost invariably of old, wrinkled, solemn and dignified-looking men.⁹⁶ Zanker suggests that, for the Romans, these portraits functioned as icons in the cult of Greek culture and learning, and that these faces were meant to be ‘read’ – a notion which suggests a knowledge of and interest in the art of physiognomy.⁹⁷ Intellectualism and old age were therefore intrinsically linked. Many of these portrait busts (copies or originals) were displayed in the houses and gardens of upper-class Romans, and some intellectual Romans had serious philosophical conversations among the portraits of their favourite philosopher. Atticus, for instance, had a bust of Aristotle in a niche and Cicero had Plato’s bust in his garden, where he would meet his friends for learned discussions. Lucian made fun of habits like these, which suggests that they might have been quite common; he depicted a Platonic philosopher, Nigrinus, who received his friends with a book in hand, surrounded by many busts of ancient philosophers.⁹⁸ Zanker points to the private aspect of these displays (in Greece, these statues were often honorific and were meant for public display), which, he argues, accentuates a separation at Rome between fascination with Greek learning and the Roman sense of public duty or business (*negotium*).⁹⁹ In Roman society, study was seen as a private matter; it should not interfere with duty to the state and the common good. This emphasises the view that learning would be especially appropriate to the aged, who would by then have relinquished many of their public duties and therefore could not be so easily accused of lack of *negotium*.

As mentioned before, by the late first to early second century AD, the age of the Second Sophistic, there was less emphasis on duty to the state than under the Republic, and the pursuit of intellectual studies became more acceptable. Portrait busts of Roman upper-class men in the guise of intellectuals began to appear. These portraits depicted aged, wrinkled, balding and bearded men (reminiscent of the philosophers of old), with thoughtful expressions (see [Plates 11 and 12](#)). The portraits were very similar to the Hellenistic philosopher-type studies of Greek intellectuals. These men may have been old, but their images suggest they were still active thinkers. The portraits reflected how these older men saw themselves, and the way they wanted to be seen by their contemporaries. These ‘thinker’ images suggest that value was attached to age and intellectual activity. As an interesting final note, many well-known ancient philosophers did actually reach an



Plates 11 and 12 These two portraits exemplify typical Roman intellectuals of the late second century AD. The depiction of age is deliberate and is synonymous with philosophical thinking and intellectualism, reminiscent of the Hellenistic philosopher-type portraits. Musei Vaticani, Rome ([Plate 11](#)); Musei Capitolini, Rome ([Plate 12](#)).

extreme old age (many reached their eighties, nineties or even a hundred years old), as was noted by Jerome, although a rational explanation for this cannot be given.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps it reinforces the view that an active mind can delay the physical ageing process and prolong intellectual prowess (as discussed in [Chapter 2](#)).

Even for the less philosophically inclined, it was considered that a certain part of the day should be set aside for improving one's mind by reading, writing and serious conversations. Pliny gave the perfect example in the daily routine of his friend Vestricius Spurinna, who was then, at the age of 77, rightfully retired, and who can be seen to have exercised both body and mind at set times of the day. Spurinna would not have encountered the problems, envisaged by Pliny and Lucilius, of retiring too early. He had given his services to the state until well into his seventies: he may briefly have been legate of Lower Germany at the age of 73 (in AD 97), was consul for the second time in AD 98 at the age of 74, and perhaps received a third consulship from Trajan when 75 (AD 100).¹⁰¹ Spurinna was depicted by Pliny as a sprightly old man, physically and mentally still very agile. Pliny stressed that Spurinna had lost none of his intellect; we are told that his old age had brought him nothing but wisdom. Spurinna's day-to-day activities, with their emphasis on both physical and mental exercise, formed the kind of ideal retirement to which the well-educated wealthy Roman, such as Pliny, aspired. Pliny described a typical day of Spurinna's industrious life in retirement in some detail, which is worth quoting almost in full:

Every morning he stays in bed for an hour after dawn, then calls for his shoes and takes a three-mile walk to exercise mind and body. If he has friends with him he carries on a serious conversation, if he is alone a book is read aloud, and this is sometimes done when there are friends present, so long as they do not object. Then he sits down, the book is continued, or preferably the conversation; after which he goes out in his carriage accompanied by his wife (a model to her sex) or one of his friends, a pleasure recently mine . . . After a drive of seven miles [carriage rides were thought to exercise the body] he will walk another mile, then sit again or retire to his room and his writing, for he composes lyric verses in both Greek and Latin with considerable success; they are remarkable for their wit, grace, and delicacy, and their charm is enhanced by the propriety of their author. When summoned to his bath (in mid-afternoon in winter and an hour earlier in summer) he first removes his clothes and takes a walk in the sunshine, if there is no wind, and then throws a ball briskly for some time, this being another form of exercise whereby he keeps old age at bay. After his bath he lies down for a short rest before dinner, and listens while something light and soothing is read aloud . . .¹⁰²

Old men, therefore, whether in retirement or in their leisure time, were said to study philosophy, read books or write verses or treatises. To read, write, study and have serious conversations were all part of the cultural self-definition of an elderly upper-class male. It proved his intellectual capabilities and ensured he could hold on to his social identity, particularly under the Empire, when there were fewer opportunities of doing this through public duties.¹⁰³ The study of philosophy aside, there are only a few instances of old men taking up completely new skills in old age. Socrates reputedly learned the lyre later in life and Cato was said to have taken up the study of Greek literature in old age, a feat mentioned in several ancient sources.¹⁰⁴ Cato's studies were especially emphasised by those who wanted to exemplify that old men were still capable of study and learning. Quintilian, for instance, wrote that Cato took up Greek studies in order that 'he might prove to mankind that even old men are capable of learning that on which they have set their hearts'.¹⁰⁵ It is of interest that Cato was well known for his condemnation of Greek culture in his earlier life, and although he was said to have known the Greek language, pride in his Roman identity did not allow him to speak Greek in public.¹⁰⁶

Not everybody, however, endorsed the idea of learning in old age. In antiquity there was also a tradition of disapproval of someone who learns late in life (*opsimathia*). In view of what I have discussed above, the existence of a hostility to learning in old age seems somehow out of character, but, I feel, this dislike is due to the dichotomy between 'duty to society' and 'time spent on study'. It was traditionally thought that the old should be useful to society and that they should be teachers and advisers. As Seneca phrased it 'the young man must store up, the old man must use'. In a subsequent passage, however, Seneca made an interesting distinction. He gave the impression that, although it was creditable to study at every age, it was not creditable to be instructed.¹⁰⁷ It seems, therefore, that learning should be a private matter; one could not publicly be seen to be a late learner, and the joining of a school was seen as unacceptable. (This would connect with Zanker's suggestion that the Roman portraits of intellectuals were only meant for private view.) Not everybody, however, ascribed to this point of view. We learn that both Seneca and Marcus Aurelius joined a school of philosophy at an older age. Apparently, both encountered criticism and felt the need to defend themselves against it: Seneca by quoting a proverb ('You should keep learning as long as you are ignorant, even to the end of your life') and Aurelius by citing a saying of Lucius ('It is a good thing even for one growing old to acquire knowledge').¹⁰⁸ It is of note that it was not the ability to learn in old age which was being questioned, but the suitability of late learning through instruction.

Contempt for late learners may, however, have been quite pervasive. It is possible that their behaviour was seen as foolish, which made them a butt for mockery and satire. Horace, in one of his satires, depicts late-learners as

pedantic fusspots, who make themselves look ridiculous by always wanting to show off their new knowledge and often getting things wrong. Lucian has the character of Hermotimus, who joined a school of philosophy at the age of 40 and is seen muttering and wildly gesticulating in the street, trying to memorise his lessons. Even Cicero made a disparaging remark about '*seri studiorum*' and thought they were apt to overdo things.¹⁰⁹ The antipathy against late learners may be partly responsible for the few instances of the learning of new skills in old age, mentioned above.

It can be seen, then, that it was generally believed among the intellectual upper classes that one should retire with dignity (*otium cum dignitate*). In old age one may have earned a more leisurely lifestyle, but one should still have a purpose in life. As Cicero phrased it, one should still have a hand on the tiller, like the pilot of a ship.¹¹⁰ Mere rest and recreation were seen as demeaning and a self-indulgence.¹¹¹ These may have been ideals, but the moralistic texts have no shortage of illustrations of old men who practised what they preached. There must have been, however, many old men who saw retirement as a time for true leisure (*otium*). *Otium* was a highly charged word in the Roman moralistic texts; it was associated with luxury and a degenerate lifestyle. People like Lucullus (first century BC), who had the reputation of leading a life of idleness, pleasure and luxury in retirement, appear to have been criticised.¹¹² But many an old man must have felt like the narrator in one of Horace's *Epistles*, who said that in his advancing years all he wished for was to be in the country, and that his chief delight was a simple meal and a snooze on the banks of a stream.¹¹³ Similarly, the fourth century AD grammarian Servius noted that in old age men should do nothing, as they prefer a quiet life.¹¹⁴ This kind of unambitious life in old age might have been the rule rather than the exception. But these men were not written about. Roman ideology always emphasised diligence (*industria*).

Old age was not an excuse for idleness (*inertia* or *desidia*), as was underlined by the moralist Valerius Maximus, who, in the preface to his chapter on 'Old Age', wrote that the material was very similar to that found in 'Study and Diligence'. His examples are of men who lived long in the service of the state (such as Valerius Corvinus, Lucius Metellus, Fabius Maximus, Appius Claudius), all traditional Roman heroes also mentioned by Cicero. These were the type of old men who were written about, were admired and held up as an *exemplum*.¹¹⁵ These texts saw old age as a positive experience, when years of study and right behaviour would have brought a certain amount of wisdom to old age. Although it was accepted that life in old age should be lived at a slower speed, particular capacities were seen as suited to old age, whether it was the advising of young people, counselling or study and improving the mind. Decline of the intellect was not considered an inevitable barrier to these pursuits.

Part III

EMOTIONAL ASPECTS OF OLD AGE

SEXUALITY

Society provides an individual with symbols and understandings for behaviour at specific stages in life. Norms on how to behave in the later stages of life were particularly prominent when sexuality was under scrutiny. How did Roman society view sexuality in old age? Was sexual intercourse still seen as viable and permissible? Were there different standards for sexuality within and outside of marriage? How did the Romans view conjugal love and affection?

The moralistic writings

Scientific and moralistic texts usually argued that sexual passions blunted in old age.¹ The cause of the diminishing of sexual desire in ageing was seen as biological. It was an accepted theory that sexual passions depended on natural heat and moisture for the production of seed. Accordingly, young men were thought to be passionate and fiery in their sexual appetites as the condition of their bodies was hot and moist. In ageing natural heat and moisture was thought to diminish, causing a waning – some even thought an extinguishing – of sexual appetite. Some physicians, such as Galen, saw sexual intercourse in old age as dangerous to the old man's health; not only would it exhaust the body, but the old were no longer capable of restoring the heat and moisture that was withdrawn by the spilling of semen.² Societally too, sexual passions were seen as unsuited to old age. An old man should no longer seek sexual adventures, but should behave with decorum and be an example to the young. Plutarch wrote, for instance:

Fathers ought above all, by not misbehaving and by doing as they ought to do, to make themselves a manifest example to their children, so that the latter, by looking at their father's lives as at a mirror, may be deterred from disgraceful deeds and words . . . For, wherever old men are lacking in decency, young men too are sure to be most shameless.³

It appears, therefore, to have been a generally accepted norm that sexual love and escapades were suited only to the young and single. Young men would marry, settle down and become serious and respectable citizens at some future date; responsibility would come with age, marriage and family commitments.⁴ Sexual passions were often associated with extravagance, bad behaviour and drunkenness. Cicero, for instance, wrote: 'Luxury is a vice at any time of life, but it is especially scandalous in old age. But if excess in sensual indulgence is added to luxurious living, it is a twofold evil . . .'⁵ It was shown again and again – in a variety of different sources and contexts – that an old man behaving like a youth was seen as foolish. It was believed that in old age men should have different values and that sexual passions should no longer be of importance. In the moralistic texts, sex was often seen as a hindrance to the leading of a satisfactory philosophical life; sexual passion and mental satisfaction were seen as mutually exclusive and sexual chastity was recommended. Cicero wrote, for instance: 'For carnal pleasure hinders deliberation, is at war with reason, blindfolds the eyes of the mind, so to speak, and has no fellowship with virtue.'⁶ In many philosophical texts sex was considered at best as a nuisance, so it was seen as important to separate the mind from the body, which would be easier in old age when sexual desires were thought to have diminished.

The receding of sexual passions in old age was seen as a boon, not as a disadvantage. Seneca, for example, wrote: 'How comforting it is to have tired out one's appetites, and to have done with them.' Endless examples and variations on this theme can be found, ranging from the fifth century BC Greek philosophers to the Christian writers.⁷ One of the earliest known instances came from Sophocles, who, when asked as an old man if he still indulged in the delights of love, allegedly replied: 'Heaven forbid. Indeed I have fled from them as from a harsh and cruel master.' This anecdote made a lasting impression and many later moralists referred to it.⁸ In old age, it was thought, pleasures of the mind should take over from pleasures of the body; the old man should allow his mind to be controlled by reasoning and wisdom, an option not so easily open to the hot-headed and impulsive youth.⁹

In the Christian writings, the need for sexual abstinence was even more prominent. While many pagan philosophical texts had depicted sexual passions as a hindrance to intellectual pursuits, the Christian texts thought sexual relations distracted from the relationship with God. Sex was seen as an obstacle to spiritual purity, and abstinence and asceticism in both men and women were highly recommended by the Church Fathers.¹⁰ Some canonists therefore advised against sexual relationships generally, some even within marriage.¹¹ Others, such as St Augustine and John Chrysostom, approved of it for reason of procreation. Abstinence was, however, commonly associated with old age and women in widowhood.¹² The belief that sexual desires blunted in old age was also found in the Christian writings. St Augustine wrote: 'Old age brings many benefits and many evils with it, benefits,

because it frees us from our passions, the cruellest of all tyrants . . .'¹³ However, it was realised – both in the pagan and the Christian texts – that sexual passions did not altogether disappear and that many old men still had sexual feelings. Several Christian sermons castigating old men accused of debauchery have survived. The accused were warned to fight their sexual stirrings. John Chrysostom's sermons were particularly virulent. In an address to the elderly among his congregation, he railed against old men who did not keep their sexual passions under subjugation and who behaved if they were still young. He saw these old men as a disgrace, both to others and to themselves. He believed that old men who do not respect themselves cannot expect the reverence traditionally paid to the old.¹⁴ He was not alone in his castigations. St Augustine reprimanded an 84-year-old married man who was thought to have indulged his sexual passions by buying himself a lyre girl for his pleasures. Augustine reputedly berated him with the words: 'Here is a vicious, corrupted, adulterous and immodest man, who glories in his disorderly ways, in whom the chills of old age have not quenched the fire of his passions . . .'¹⁵

So it can be seen that there was a common concern about sexuality in old age, both in the pagan and in the Christian moralistic writings. If any sexual feelings still existed they should be subjugated, as sexual passions clouded the mind or the spirit. Culturally, too, sexual passions in old age were seen as undesirable. The sexually active old man was seen as unstable and lacking in judiciousness.¹⁶ It is of interest that, in a few instances, a contradiction can be found between the writings of some of the moralists and their alleged actual behaviour or experiences. Cicero, in *De Senectute*, had Cato declare that sexual passions blunted in old age, which was to be desired (although he conceded that old age was not completely devoid of sexual desires).¹⁷ Cato and Cicero, as old men, remarried, in both cases to very young girls, as will be discussed below. From St Augustine's writings we learn that he had sexual fantasies in his dreams when he was old and that he was having difficulties in controlling these feelings.¹⁸ The very authors who saw an almost stereotypical blunting of sexual desires in old age did not always experience this themselves. We may have examples of only a few, but there is no reason not to assume their experience was atypical.

The more popular sources

As has been shown, many moralists claimed to have been happy about the diminishing of sexual pleasures in old age. This cannot have been a common feeling. Cicero presented 'lack of sensual pleasures' as the third complaint (*vituperatio*) against old age in his work *De Senectute*. Furthermore, regret for the loss of sexual appetite and sensual pleasures was a regular topos in poetry and satire.¹⁹ Horace, for instance, wrote: 'Our pleasures steal off one by one, with the years, which have already snatched away my zest for laughter and love, for playing and feasting.'²⁰ Horace's poetry showed a certain sadness for, but

also an acceptance of, the diminishing of desire. He acknowledged that a different age would mean a different role in life and that sexual pleasures no longer suited the old. That different ages meant different behaviour was particularly clearly spelled out by Maximianus:

To mention these features [the search for love] once sought for is
 shameful for old men,
 And that which once was quite proper is now a sin.
 Different things please different men; not everything
 Is fit for all ages; what suited once now harms.
 The boy delights in games, old age in sternness:
 Between them both there stands a young man's charm.²¹

Maximianus, whose elegy on old age was said to be autobiographical, evidently yearned for his younger years as a lover, as can be gleaned from the verse above. Regret for the loss of sexual pleasures was only one of many topics on the theme of sexuality in old age. Other motifs describe the incongruity between sexual love and the extreme physical ugliness of the old man, the inappropriateness of his behaviour, or his alleged impotence. I will explore a few examples from each topic.

Love was associated with youth and beauty. The love-poets – usually young – showed no sympathy for the aged lover, and a certain repulsion was expressed at the idea of sexual relationships between an old man and a young girl. An ugly old man approaching a beautiful young girl for love was seen as ridiculous, and the old lover was invariably rejected. In the epigrammatist Palladas' words: 'The women mock me for being old, bidding me look at the wreck of my years in the mirror.' The rejected lover in Palladas' epigram found compensating delights, not in the pleasures of the mind – beloved by the philosophers – but in wine, flowers and ointments. One option was to pay for love, as in Tibullus: 'Ask for no presents: these a hoary lover give, / that soft arms may warm his chilly limbs.'²²

Another option was for the old to make do with toadies. The old, rich and childless of both sexes were, according to literary sources, cultivated by young men and women in order to be remembered in their wills. The favours granted could be of a sexual nature, as was suggested in some of the satires of Juvenal and Lucian. Juvenal wrote:

Today we are elbowed aside
 by men who earn legacies in bed, who rise to the top
 Via that quickest, most popular route – the satisfied desires
 Of some rich old matron.²³

We do not know if sexual services were common in reality. More usual tactics of legacy seekers would be visitations, presents, attendance at dinners, sick-

bed attentions, and so on. Legacy hunting (*captatio*) was portrayed as a moral crime. It was thought that the old were taken advantage of and the *captator* was despised.²⁴ The captated were, however, not always seen as victims. The roles could be reversed and the old and rich without children were also depicted as powerful. Lucian described one of his characters as a jolly but decrepit ‘bald, bleary-eyed and rheumy’ 98-year-old, who took full advantage of the sexual advances made to him by both male and female fortune-hunters and lived life to the full – and, to spite his fortune-hunters, made a 20-year-old slave his heir.²⁵

Old men did not always behave as society expected them to, and misbehaving old men became a popular feature of Roman comedy.²⁶ Here, respectable older members of society – senators, married men and fathers of grown-up children – were portrayed as reverting back to the behaviour of their youth, by womanising and showing off their virility. The *senex* Demipho in Plautus’ *Mercator* is an example. Demipho, a stereotypical old man in love, is out for a last fling:

I will take up my old ways again. I certainly will, and be good to myself. Only a short space of life is left me, I’ll sweeten it with pleasure, and wine and love. Why, my age is just the proper season to have my fling.²⁷

The old Demipho was depicted as exceedingly ugly. He was described as a ‘grey-haired, knock-kneed, pot-bellied, big-mouthed, stubby sort of fellow, with blackish eyes, lantern jaws and feet a bit splayed’.²⁸ Yet, he was searching for love. Such a misbehaving old man left himself open to ridicule and he would have been jeered and giped at.

In Roman comedy the characters often behaved in exactly the opposite way to that expected from the ‘perfect’ Roman citizen.²⁹ The Roman *senex*, for example, had a precise role to play in life. One of his roles was to teach the young how to behave. He should, as can be learned from Horace, ‘decrease the ruinous urge [of the young] to be profligate’.³⁰ He certainly should not join in the game of love himself. Yet, in the plot, Demipho falls in love with a young girl and becomes unwittingly the rival of his son. The play shows that the old Demipho is aware of breaking societal boundaries by falling in love.³¹ The old man, who ought to have been a bulwark of Roman society, suggests a role reversal in which the old make love and the young make money. To the Romans, this suggestion would have been absurd, as can be learned, for example, from another character, a young man who counteracts Demipho’s proposal with the suggestion that a law should be formulated to prevent old men over 60 from going wenching.³² But at the end of the play the conventions are upheld; Demipho sees the error of his ways and his son rightfully gets the girl. The *senex amator* in *Mercator*, and other Plautian comedy, is a farcical stock figure of a ‘man behaving badly’. He provides a

good basis for comedy and his role underlines how an elderly respectable father and citizen was expected not to behave.

Another common theme in popular literature is the old man's (alleged) impotence. The old man is shown to be too decrepit to have sex, which is only for the young and virile. Satire in particular could be very savage. From Juvenal:

and all pleasures of the flesh have long been forgotten,
or if they try it's hopeless, though they labour all night long
At that limp and shrivelled object, limp it remains.
What can the future hold for these impotent dodderers?
Nothing very exciting. Sex is a pretty dead loss . . .³³

A humorous and more gentle example can be found in an epigram by Philomedus. The narrator – no longer young, but not quite old yet – is already experiencing a decline in sexual vigour. He dreads the thought of old age, when his sexual prowess would decline even more:

I used to score five, even nine times, Venus,
{and} can now scarcely get it up once
between sundown and sunrise. Oh man!
Here's a case of slow death . . . lately,
a series of fatal strokes. I have it coming.
Old age, old age, how will you treat me,
later on if we meet, when now I'm so burnt out?³⁴

Virility was important to a Roman. The masculine noun *vir*, an adult male, was also used for a husband and lover.³⁵ The noun and its derivatives often have a specific nuance: *vir* refers to a 'real man' – that is, one who penetrates. A male always had to be the active partner. As Veyne wrote: 'To be active is to be a male, whatever the sex of the passive partner.'³⁶ An aged, impotent man, therefore, could no longer 'act like a man' and forfeited his masculinity. Virility was seen as on a par with manliness, which was, in turn, equated to political virtue and political power. A man had to be dominant; masculinity also had associations with soldiering and adventurous spirit. One of Martial's characters implies that an old man would have to resort to oral sex in order to satisfy his sexual passions.³⁷ Oral sex was non-penetrative and was seen as degrading and unmanly. A real man must always and only play the insertive role, as is emphasised by Williams.³⁸ To be impotent was therefore a serious accusation which would have obvious implications for the status of the old man.

It can be established, then, that the majority of popular texts proclaimed that old men were still keen on sexual escapades, even if these were no longer physically viable or culturally advisable. The large body of literary writings

on sexuality in old age shows that there was a great deal of interest in the subject. Although the approach and aims of the various literary genres were dissimilar – the popular genre aimed to amuse or to impress, the moralistic type was out to teach or preach – the message was the same. It was made abundantly clear that sex and old age were seen as incompatible; a societal embargo which must have been very pervasive.

Representations of sexuality in old age in ‘real life’

So far philosophical ideals and fictional sources have been investigated, leaving out representations of old-age sexuality in real life. This section has a more utilitarian approach and considers sexuality in the context of a Roman marriage. In order to understand attitudes to sexuality both inside and outside marriage, and to establish if and how this may have differed over the course of life, it will be useful to look very briefly at how the Romans viewed the institution of marriage.³⁹ Among the Roman elite, marriages – and especially first marriages – were generally arranged by the older generation, usually to facilitate political ties between the two families, or for material purposes; this did not mean that the wishes of the intended couple were totally ignored, especially if the couple were older. It can be established that marriage was regarded as an institution designed for the production of legitimate children.⁴⁰ Mutual affection and companionship were often named in the ideal concept of marriage, but sexual satisfaction was seldom mentioned, and sexual attraction was not seen as a justified reason to institute a marriage.

In view of this, a number of questions arise. If marriage was for the procreation of children, should sex stop after one’s reproductive years and should marriages take place between people who were past child-producing years? Were there any objections to the marriage between an older man (who was less fertile, whose sexual passions were believed to be on the wane, and who was therefore less likely to father a child) and a young girl? Or the reverse, an old woman, who would no longer be able to produce children, and a younger, still fertile, man? If, as I shall argue, sexual relations in old age within a marriage were socially disapproved of, what options were open to the elderly who still had sexual passions?

A caveat must be mentioned here. The Romans could be very explicit about the nature of sexual passions and various sexual practices in their literary writings – sexual invective, in often crude or obscene language, was a popular subject in Roman humour. They were, however, much more inhibited about the discussion of sexual relationships within a marriage. The subject of sexuality, in married old age especially, was characterised by silence. Information on marital relations in old age is based largely on conjecture. Naturally this is problematic, but, as I shall show, it is possible to draw from the available sources some useful conclusions on the marital relationships of the aged.

Sex within marriage

At Rome, sexual activities within marriage were usually regarded not for pleasure but for the purpose of creating children. Sex was therefore particularly associated with the young, as they were at the height of their strength, health and fertility. Aristotle, for example, saw the age of 50 as the limit for producing children (in the male), as he believed the children of old men to be weak (*Gen. An.* 675). Newlyweds were also seen as more passionate. Plutarch believed that sexual passions in a marriage did not endure: after the first flush of desire in youth, companionship and affection would take the place of sexual passions.⁴¹ Passionate relationships between a married couple were not generally recommended.⁴² Sexual chastity, even within marriage, was especially important for the Stoics. From Musonius:

Men who are not wanton or immoral are bound to consider sexual intercourse justified only when it occurs in marriage and is indulged in for the purpose of begetting children, since that is lawful, but unjust and unlawful when it is mere pleasure seeking, even in marriage.⁴³

His words suggest that sexual relationships between an elderly married couple would be seen as unwarranted, as the production of legitimate children was no longer possible.

That marriage was seen as an institution for procreation was underwritten by custom and by law. When a Roman census was held, it was customary for the censors to ask those of the equestrian and senatorial order whether they had married for the purpose of creating children (*liberorum procreandorum causa*).⁴⁴ Under the principate, the terms of the Augustan marriage laws stated that men were encouraged to remarry (and non-compliance would incur certain penalties) up to the age of 60, and women until the age of 50, which were thought to be the reproductive limits for the respective sexes.⁴⁵ That the age of 60 was the age the Papian–Poppaeian Law saw as the limit for sexual intercourse can also be found in a remark by Seneca: ‘So why is it then that Jupiter, who is depicted among the poets as most lustful, has ceased to raise children? Is it because he has become a sexagenarian and the *lex Papia* has placed a restraint on him?’⁴⁶ Tiberius is said to have supplemented the Papian–Poppaeian Law by a senatorial decree, the *senatus consultum Pernicianum*, AD 34, which stated that such persons were still liable for penalties if they had not satisfied the statutory requirement (that is, the bearing of children) before reaching the specified ages. This requirement was subsequently cancelled by a Claudian *senatus consultum* (*Claudianum*), which stated that men over 60 would escape penalties if they married a woman under 50 (presumably it was thought that a man over 60 could still father a child if his wife was under 50).⁴⁷ In law, sterility and old age were mentioned, among a

number of other causes, as grounds for divorce without loss of gifts or dowry.⁴⁸

It appears, therefore, that the Romans did not see much point in a marriage when procreation was no longer possible – as in old age. A marriage between two older people might therefore incur criticism and be considered inappropriate or unwarranted, but probably not illegal.⁴⁹ Valerius Maximus noted a case brought before Augustus, in which a woman, Septicia of Ariminum, herself of advanced age and past child-bearing, married an old man (*senex*). When she died she left her estate to her husband, bypassing her sons from a previous marriage with whom she had quarrelled. Augustus ruled that her will should be cancelled because her marriage had not taken place for the purpose of producing children. He even forbade the husband to keep his wife's dowry.⁵⁰ Pliny related how a middle-aged woman was severely criticised for marrying a wealthy and very decrepit old man. The woman was said to have been long widowed, had borne children in the past, and was no longer young, so no further children could therefore be expected from this marriage.⁵¹

From these examples, although scattered and diverse, I think it is reasonable to infer that the end of one's reproductive years was seen as a natural demarcation line between appropriate and inappropriate sexual activity, although this was nowhere explicitly stated. Sexual relationships in old age within a marriage were characterised by silence, which in itself is significant. For a woman, the end of her reproductive years may have meant the end of all sexual activity. For a man, whose reproductive years ended, in chronological terms, much later than a woman's (and it was more difficult to establish when his reproductive years ended), there was the opportunity to remarry a younger partner; alternatively he could have his sexual needs met outside marriage (as will be discussed on pp. 128–130). Such options were not open to older women. De Beauvoir remarked that in traditional societies a woman after the menopause is a being without sex; this cannot have been very different in Roman society. That the ability to procreate ceased earlier for women than for men may be the reason for [ps] Quintilian's observation that women aged earlier than men. He wrote 'among couples of equal age, the woman grows old more quickly'.⁵²

It seems that in ageing, wives lost their sexual attractiveness to their – also elderly – husbands. Once again, there are few examples from historical cases, but the literary sources are more forthcoming. Plautus has an old man claim that sleep had no charm for him because he is married to an old dowered wife (a dowry had to be returned on divorce). Aelian, the second–third century AD Stoic writer, believed that long-married husbands take no notice of their elderly, lawfully wedded wives and ogle young girls. Juvenal, with his usual sarcasm, depicted Roman husbands as ready to abandon their wives at the first signs of wrinkles and sagging skin, trading them in for younger models. In real life, Terentia allegedly accused Cicero of a

similar offence when he divorced her in old age in order to marry a young girl.⁵³

It can be seen that procreation was all-important in a Roman marriage, which suggests that sexual relationships were no longer appropriate in old age; but we have no evidence of what actually happened to sexual relationships between an elderly married couple. As this knowledge is lacking, it will be advantageous to look briefly at some modern research findings on this subject, bearing in mind that most marriages in contemporary western society are made because of personal and/or sexual attraction. Gerontologists, psychologists and anthropologists have taken a great deal of interest over the last few decades in the sexuality of the aged, but have not come to an agreement on the extent of sexual activity in old age, or when it declines or stops. Not unlike the Roman days, the sexuality of older people is largely characterised by omission.⁵⁴ A report by Marsiglio and Donnelly (1991) shows a decline in, but by no means a cessation of, sexual activity in old age. It was generally found that although sexual interest and activity tended to decrease in later life compared to earlier years, many older people continued to have active and enjoyable sexual intercourse (Archibald and Baikie 1998:225). A report by Pfeiffer *et al.* (1968) showed the median age of cessation as around 60 for women (with a high of 81) and 69 for men (with a range of 49–90).⁵⁵ Men were said to be deterred from sexual activity because of ill-health, impotence or fear of failure (Gibson 1993:114–115).

Today's younger people see the old as asexual and take a puritanical view of the sexual behaviour of the elderly.⁵⁶ This is comparable to the disgust shown by the young Roman love-poets when considering the sexuality of the aged. It is noticeable that, with some exceptions (such as the taboo on unproductive sex within marriage), cultural attitudes to sexuality in old age have not changed dramatically since the days of ancient Rome. Sex in old age is still socially disapproved of, especially by the younger generation – but not necessarily by the elderly themselves.⁵⁷ This was especially made clear in a sensitive novel by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *Love in the Time of Cholera*. In it he touchingly described the love between a 72-year-old widow, Femina, and her 76-year-old childhood sweetheart, who meet again after 50 years. We are under no illusion about the physical decrepitude of this elderly couple, the woman especially being very conscious of her aged body. The woman's children were disgusted when they realised the couple's relationship was both romantic and sexual; her middle-aged daughter shouted 'love is ridiculous at our age, but at theirs it's revolting'.

Modern research reveals that disapproval of others can influence whether or not a person is sexually active later in life.⁵⁸ Those in middle and old age are believed to conform voluntarily to the roles they are meant to play.⁵⁹ This may also have been so in ancient Rome, where, as I have shown, there was a strong emphasis on a specific age-related behaviour pattern. The Romans were innately conservative people. The custom of the ancestors (*mos maiorum*)

was ingrained into the fabric of Roman society, which would have encouraged conformity. Most of today's research suggests that sexuality in old age is influenced by both physiological and socio-psychological changes, which is not dissimilar to the physiological and expected behavioural patterns which the ancient Romans believed influenced – or should influence – sexuality in old age.⁶⁰

Compatibility of marriages between the old and the young

As a man's reproductive years do not end until the age of 60 or 70 (or even later), it was not uncommon – and therefore, it could be argued, culturally acceptable – for an old or older man to remarry a much younger woman. Most men were around ten years older than their partners at their first marriage; in aristocratic circles, the ages at marriage were approximately 15 for girls and 25 for men.⁶¹ It was hoped that this marriage would last right into old age. In practice, however, this was not often the case. Through the death of one of the partners, or divorce (which was, from the late Republic onwards, fairly prevalent in Roman society), remarriages appear to have been frequent. Second, third, or even fourth marriages – with large age differences between husband and wife – were not unusual.⁶² For instance, the age difference between Tiberius Gracchus and his wife Cornelia may have been about 30 years (according to a calculation by Hemelrijk).⁶³ Caesar's daughter Julia was about 15 years old when she married the 47-year-old Pompey. Julia was his fourth wife and of much the same age as Pompey's children from his previous marriage. After Julia's death in childbirth, Pompey married again, this time to the much younger Cornelia, daughter of Metellus Scipio. Another Julia, Augustus' daughter, was aged 18 when she married Agrippa, who was around 43 at the time (she bore him five children). Pliny, in his forties, married the very young Calpurnia (perhaps aged 15), his third wife.

The relationship within these marriages was often unequal. Pliny, for example, still added to his young wife's education and we are told that she sat behind a screen when he gave public readings from his literary writings.⁶⁴ A young wife might therefore have been an attractive proposition, as she would be more malleable and could be educated according to the wishes of her older husband. Plutarch, for instance, believed that a husband should be a 'guide, philosopher and a teacher' to his wife.⁶⁵ Large age differences were also shown on the portraits of husband and wife on the funerary altars of the Roman freedmen, although some idealisation in the depiction of the women must be taken into consideration. From these examples it appears that marriages between an older man and a young girl were seen as compatible.⁶⁶

The purpose of procreation was frequently mentioned as the reason for a marriage between an older man and a much younger woman. Pliny, for example, married the young Calpurnia because he was in need of an heir; his two first wives were unable to have children. Marriages with large age

differences between husband and wife can be seen to have been consummated (they produced pregnancies and children), even if the age differences were very substantial and the husband in question was of extreme old age and the wife in her early teens. Masinissa, king of Numidia, whose physical vigour and endurance was almost legendary, left a child aged four when he died at the age of 90 years, which was unusual enough to attract attention.⁶⁷ Some criticism on elderly fathers can also be found. Aristotle wrote that 'they get no good from their children, nor the children from them'. The former was presumably a reference to children as a sort of social security, a subject that will be discussed in [Chapter 8](#).⁶⁸ Sexual attraction was not generally mentioned as a reason for marriages between old men and young girls, but this cannot be completely ignored. Plutarch made a remark about the 'youthful beauty' of Pompey's young bride (Cornelia, the daughter of Metellus Scipio), but the marriage was ostensibly made for political purposes.⁶⁹ Terentia, who was divorced by Cicero so he could marry the young Publilia, apparently accused Cicero of marrying the girl because he was swept off his feet by her youth and charm.⁷⁰ Malleability, as put forward above, was another possible reason.

I have suggested that, generally, the ancient sources did not question the compatibility of a marriage with great age disparities – that is, in favour of the man. However, when sexual compatibility came under scrutiny, misgivings were expressed by some of the moralists. Plutarch especially had doubts on the appropriateness of such marriages. He criticised the young Julia's alleged ardour for her much older husband Pompey. He wrote 'the young wife's fondness for her husband was notorious, and Pompey, at his age, scarcely seemed to be a fit object for such passionate devotion'.⁷¹ Plutarch castigated Cato (who was then aged about 79) for his late marriage to a young girl, seeing the marriage as 'unseasonal, too late in life, and indecent', and made a special mention of Cicero's advanced age on his second marriage. (Cicero was then aged 60; his daughter Tullia would have been about twice the age of her young stepmother Publilia, aged 15.) Plutarch also noted that Pompey's fifth wife, Cornelia, was young enough to have married Pompey's son. He claimed to have not been alone in his disapproval of this marriage.⁷² Some objection against marriages between an older man and a young girl must therefore have been prevalent in Roman society, in spite of the common occurrence of such marriages.

Serial marriages – with great age differences – could create other complications, such as unusual family constructions caused by a blurring of generations.⁷³ This could create a range of problems, from the sexual to the social. Children from a former marriage could be older than, or the same age as, their stepmother, producing a danger of sexual attraction between stepmother and stepsons. Valerius Maximus has the example of the censor, L. Gellius, who suspected his son of adultery with his stepmother.⁷⁴ For the wealthy elite, remarriages could bring complications to wills and property matters and jeopardise the inheritance of existing offspring. Pliny depicted a

case where an 80-year-old man had fallen in love with a young woman and within ten days married her. He brought home a new stepmother and disinherited his daughter. On his death, his daughter sued for her patrimony; she won her case and received part of her patrimony. We are told by Pliny that the case attracted a great deal of interest, suggesting this kind of situation may not have been uncommon.⁷⁵ In contemporary society, too, loss of inheritance is a major factor in children's disapproval of an older parent's remarriage, as is argued by Laswell, who also mentioned the ideal of celibacy of ageing parents.⁷⁶

The impression of sexual incompatibility in marriages between the old and the young found in the moralistic texts was enhanced by examples from fictional literary sources. Quintilian, for instance, remarked that a disparity in ages between a husband and wife does not make for a happy marriage. Aelian (second century AD) thought a young woman married to an old man would soon grow tired of him and chase after young men, and Catullus depicted a young girl who fooled around and flirted right under her old and impotent husband's nose.⁷⁷ In comedy, old men wishing to marry young wives were warned off and were told that their time for marrying was long past. Plutarch, in *An Seni Respublica Gerenda Sit*, showed several examples of plays and poems (no longer extant) which made fun of old men who married young girls.⁷⁸ Such themes must have had some base in reality; as a topos in literature they were universal and lasted over the centuries, as, for example, in Chaucer's *The Miller's Tale*:

Of eighteteene yeer she was of age.
 Jalous he was, and heeld hire narwe in cage,
 For she was wylde and yong, and he was old,
 And demed hymself been lik a cokewold.⁷⁹

There was therefore some ambivalence in societal attitudes to a marriage between an old or older man and a young girl, usually based on sexual incompatibility. But a young man marrying an old woman who could no longer bear children was more generally seen as disreputable; such a young man would make a travesty out of the institution of marriage. Under an undated *senatus consultum* (*Calvisianum*), marriage between a man under 60 and a woman over 50 – that is, a woman past her reproductive years and a man still capable of procreation – was seen as unequal (*impar*). The *senatus consultum* severely penalised those who began marriage at such an age; the couple could not take legacies, inheritance or dowry. Such marriages were, however, not illegal.⁸⁰ So why should a young man marry an old woman? The literary sources depicted greed as the reason. An anonymous epigrammist saw an old woman as a 'rich coffin'. Martial portrayed a hungry young pauper who married a rich old woman and had to 'feed and fuck her'. The woman's motive, Martial implied, was lust.⁸¹

Sexual relationships outside marriage

As marriages were usually of convenience, and sexual intercourse within marriage was thought to be for the creation of children only, it is often thought by modern scholars that the Roman man gained sexual satisfaction outside marriage. Treggiari, for example, argued that there are few explicit claims that men were thought to have an automatic right to sexual satisfaction, but there seems to have been an implicit assumption in Roman society that intercourse with a slave of one's own household, a mistress or a courtesan, was culturally acceptable.⁸² (This was different in late antiquity, when sexual relationships outside marriage were seen as sinful by the Church Fathers.⁸³) Under the Augustan marriage laws sexual intercourse with this class of people was not regarded as adultery, at least not for men.⁸⁴ The literary writings – especially the Augustan poets – gave the impression that for men, extramarital relationships were not unusual. Even Plutarch, a moralist, condoned extramarital sex: he advised wives to turn a blind eye to husbands' philandering.⁸⁵ It can be established that having a sexual relationship with one's slave girl was not generally condemned and may have been a regular occurrence. From Musonius Rufus (who, as a Stoic, was against extramarital sex):

So no one with any self-control would think of having relations with a courtesan or a free woman apart from marriage, no, nor even with his own maidservant . . . *a thing which some people consider quite without blame.*⁸⁶

But were extramarital relationships still seen to be, to borrow Musonius' words, 'without blame' in old age, bearing in mind the distaste for an old man's sexual passions which was so dominant in the moralistic and fictional writings? Some case studies will be useful.

There are many anecdotes on the sexual activities of emperors in old age. Many of these stories may be gossip, or politically motivated, but they nevertheless give an insight into what was and was not socially acceptable. Augustus was said by Suetonius to have been a womaniser, and, even as an old man, reputedly harboured a passion for deflowering girls, who were collected for him from every quarter, 'even by his wife'. Suetonius clearly disapproved of Augustus' behaviour, his advanced age and of Livia's complicity in this matter.⁸⁷ Suetonius' text also revealed, unwittingly, a double standard in Augustus' attitude to sexual behaviour. Augustus had, allegedly, deflowered young virgins as an old man; yet he had another old man, Cestius Gallus, who was said by Suetonius to have been a 'lecherous old spendthrift', ignominiously removed from the senate for lecherous behaviour.⁸⁸ Cestius Gallus' dinner parties were notorious, with food being served by naked girls. Tiberius was said to have attended one of these parties, at a time when he was engaged on

the reform of public morals.⁸⁹ Tiberius' sex life in old age – when he had withdrawn from Roman society and had retired to Capreae at the age of 69 – was said to have been lurid and notorious. His alleged sexual extravagances in old age were severely criticised by later commentators, as, for example, Suetonius and Tacitus.⁹⁰ Suetonius depicted him as a lecherous old man – repeatedly emphasising his age – who had all kinds of obscenities performed for him 'in order to excite his waning passions'.⁹¹

So both Augustus and Tiberius were criticised, both for their age and for the nature of their sexual needs. But not all emperors were attacked for having sexual relationships in old age. Vespasian was said to have had, after the death of his mistress Caenis, regular afternoon naps with one of several mistresses. Suetonius did not mention Vespasian's age (he must have been over 60), nor did he pass judgement, probably because, as Balsdon noted, the relationships did not create a scandal.⁹² Nor did the sources criticise Marcus Aurelius, who allegedly took on a concubine after the death of his wife Faustina (who died when he was aged 55) in order not to burden his adult children with a young stepmother – a child from a marriage would have put the inheritance of his existing children in jeopardy.⁹³ It must, however, be noted that Aurelius expressed relief that he was not brought up longer than he was with his grandfather's concubine. It is not sure why he objected, perhaps he was, as a boy, embarrassed to live in a household with a concubine present; perhaps he disapproved of his grandfather's status or time of life.⁹⁴

It would be foolish to assume that every old or older man would practise self-restraint in all sexual matters, as the moralistic texts proposed he should do. I would argue that there are good grounds for the suggestion that sexual liaisons were tolerated, even in old age, as long as the affair was conducted privately and with discretion and did not create a scandal. This was particularly true of people who were, or had been, public figures, who always had to be seen to be an example to the younger generation. This is underlined by an incident recalled by Plutarch concerning the elder Cato. Cato was said to have been 'in advanced old age' (he was then aged about 79), when he was caught by his son Licinianus bedding a slave girl. Plutarch wrote that Cato's son was greatly angered, and gave the impression that this was because Cato was living in the same household as his son and his relationship with a slave girl embarrassed his son's young wife. The slave girl was said to have flaunted her relationship. In reaction, perhaps in order to spite his son, Cato married the very young daughter of one of his clients, with whom he later had a son (he was then about 80 years old).⁹⁵ Plutarch saw Cato's behaviour as disgraceful. He wrote: 'Even when an old man he was prone to indulge his sexual appetite, and at last married a wife when he was well past the marrying age'.⁹⁶ Cato, who was always insistent upon chastity in others (for example, in his role as censor, he was said to have punished a senator who embraced his wife passionately in public, in front of their young daughter), can be seen to have applied a double standard to sexual matters, as his own behaviour

was not beyond reproach.⁹⁷ Another older man criticised by Plutarch for sexual misdemeanour was Lucullus, who, when retired, was said to have indulged in sexual debauchery and was accused of having indulged in sexual intercourse 'even in the day time'.⁹⁸

Cultural assumptions and expectations about how an old person's life should be lived were well established and the behaviour of an old man in the public eye had to be seen to be irreproachable. A great deal was therefore expected of an old man; he always had to be seen to be self-controlled and to keep up an appearance as an example to the younger generation. If he did not conform he left himself open to scorn and, it was thought, he could not expect the reverence and respect his age entitled him to. As I have shown, this led in some cases to a duplicity in behaviour; some old men would publicly promote sexual chastity, but would not always live up to this in private life.

Conjugal affection

The hope of children was seen as the prime purpose of a marriage; but *concordia* between husband and wife – defined as harmony, mutual affection and companionship – was also frequently mentioned within the ideal concept of marriage. Sexual pleasure may have been part of a loving, affectionate relationship, but this was not, at least not explicitly, emphasised. Musonius wrote, for example:

in marriage there must be above all perfect companionship and a mutual love of husband and wife, both in health and in sickness and under all conditions, since it was with desire for this as well as for having children that both entered upon marriage.⁹⁹

Given the background of arranged marriages, some scholars have questioned the validity of such ideals. Others have, convincingly I think, argued that marriage was seen as a partnership.¹⁰⁰ With the exception of Cicero's exile letters to Terentia we do not have any real letters or diaries with genuine representations of sentimental feelings between husband and wife, but examples of expressions of love and affection between a married couple can be found in the fictional literary sources and as epitaphs on tombstones.¹⁰¹ To be sure, since the literary sources were meant for publication they contain conventional expressions that make use of literary conceits, while funerary inscriptions declare many customary expressions of love and affection. This does not mean, however, that the feelings expressed were without meaning. The language of grief shown at the death of one of the partners, or when a couple were separated, may have been conventional, but it was not necessarily insincere. In inscriptional evidence, occurrences of long and happy marriages, without discord (*sine discrimine, sine offensione, sine ulla querela*), were

regularly expressed and references to successful marriages lasting as long as 35, 48 or even 60 years can be found.¹⁰² The very mention of the length of marriage might have meant they were exceptions.

Similar sentiments can be found in Pliny, who praised the exemplary marriage of his friend Macrinus. This marriage was said to have been long and pleasurable and the couple had, according to Pliny, lived together for 39 years without quarrel and misunderstanding.¹⁰³ There is no way of knowing how sincere these sentiments were, but at least they outline the ideal and the aspiration to a long and happy marriage. Another example related by Pliny is that of the elder Arria, who reputedly showed her husband how to commit suicide with the words 'it does not hurt, Paetus'. Of interest here is that, according to Pliny, Arria believed it was her right to die with her husband, because she had spent such long and happy years with him.¹⁰⁴

A further instance would be the lengthy and extremely detailed tomb inscription dedicated to a wife, Turia, in which her husband emphasised their long and happy marriage.¹⁰⁵ The laudatory sentiments expressed are traditional, but it is interesting that, although Turia appeared not to be able to have children, her husband remained loyal to her in spite of her offer of divorce. Given the emphasis on procreation in a Roman marriage, this points, I think, to a genuine and long-lasting affection between the couple. Furthermore, the husband lamented that he, the older consort, was left to cope without her. This suggests that the husband may not have contemplated a further marriage, which is somewhat unusual. Many older men appear to have remarried after the death of their wives, as was encouraged until the age of 60 under the Augustan marriage laws. Whether to remarry or not after a long and happy marriage seems to have been something of a dilemma, at least for men. While older widowers were encouraged to remarry, older widows were expected to remain single. Propertius wrote a consolatory elegy depicting Cornelia, wife of Paullus Aemilius Lepidus, who died prematurely. She talked from beyond the grave, showing concern about her husband's choices: remarrying or facing a lonely old age.¹⁰⁶

It is of note that the length of a happy marriage was often emphasised. This may be, as mentioned above, because a long marriage was considered unusual, but the view that mutual appreciation and affection grow over the years can be found in several texts. Lucretius, for example, wrote that love grows over the years (*consuetudo concinnat amorem*). Plutarch believed that over time a wife's personality and companionship were more greatly appreciated by her husband than sexual attraction and beauty.¹⁰⁷ Naturally not all Roman marriages were emotionally fulfilling, or long-lasting. Marriages were arranged and divorce was easy, and it is not difficult to find many instances where emotional feelings between a couple were not present or of scant importance. Many fictional literary sources, from comedy to satire, depict the horrors of marriage. Although the stories of quarrelling couples

are fictional and are no doubt exaggerated, the situations must have shown some semblance to reality.

But a regularly expressed aspiration for a long, lasting and happy marriage existed. Implicit in this ideal was that husband and wife were companions who would support each other throughout their lives, through happy times and in adversity, right into old age, when they would help each other to overcome the inevitable burdens of ageing. Some couples appear to have achieved these ideals, but many others did not. An example of a happy marriage might have been that of Augustus and Livia, who were said to have had a close and supportive relationship right into old age. Augustus, in a speech promoting marriage in AD 9 (when he was 72 years old), is said to have remarked that a wife would 'soften the crabbed severity of old age', and on his deathbed he is said to have kissed Livia with the words 'Goodbye Livia, never forget our marriage.'¹⁰⁸ According to Dio, Livia was much grieved by the death of her husband, staying beside Augustus' funeral pyre for five days. In gratitude to her happy marriage she dedicated a shrine to Concordia.¹⁰⁹

The ideal that husband and wife would support each other in old age can also be found in marriages with large age differences. Pliny, for instance, depicted the elderly and very decrepit Domitius Tullus, who went on living, *and kept his will to live*, because he was supported and cared for by his devoted middle-aged wife.¹¹⁰ Another example is Seneca, who – at a time when he was feeling ill and old – reminded himself that he ought to take care of his health for the sake of his much younger wife, Paulina, who would be lost without him. He wrote: 'the good man should not live as long as it pleases him, but as long as he ought. He who does not value his wife highly enough to linger longer in life – he who obstinately persists in dying – is a voluptuary.'¹¹¹

The expectation of support and companionship in old age can be further upheld by a reputed remark from a representation of real life and a fictional tale. Mark Antony was said to have attacked Cicero for divorcing his wife of many years and accused him of casting out the wife with whom he had grown old. Antony may have been politically motivated (he had personal and political squabbles with Cicero), but his words suggest that Terentia was denied Cicero's support in old age and the insult must have struck a social chord.¹¹² Ovid told the mythological tale of Baucis and Philemon, a pair of elderly peasants. As a reward for supplying the gods Zeus and Hermes – who visited them in disguise – with sustenance, the elderly couple requested that, since they had spent their lives in constant company, they should die simultaneously and should not have the grief of surviving alone. Their wish was granted, and after death the couple were metamorphosed into two trees, growing from one trunk.¹¹³ To many modern readers this may appear a sentimental story, but it was one which reflected the conventional ideal of the time. Not to be left behind was a commonly voiced sentiment. It can be found, for instance, in the lamentations of Turia's husband and Arria (as

mentioned above), and was also expressed on epigraphs. It was a poignant complaint.¹¹⁴ Juvenal treated it as a charge against old age:

The old man: he'll have to bury his sons, he'll witness
 His dear wife's end, and his brother's, he'll see the urns
 filled with his sister's ashes. Such are the penalties
 If you live to a ripe old age – perpetual grief,
 Black mourning, a world of sorrow, ever-recurrent
 Family bereavements to haunt your declining years . . .¹¹⁵

It can therefore be established that the Romans subscribed to the ideal of a marriage in which companionship, trust and harmony (*concordia*) would be long-lasting. Implicit here is the expectation that husband and wife were partners, and would be of mutual support to each other throughout their marriage and comfort each other in old age.

ABUSE OF OLD WOMEN

Roman male writers commonly represented the status of women in distinct black-and-white terms – a woman was either a respectable wife and mother, or she was disreputable. This chapter deals with the latter group of women. These women usually provided sexual pleasures, as mistresses, courtesans, prostitutes, music girls, and so on. Our knowledge of these women comes mostly from the more popular literary sources, and the content and tone of this chapter are therefore significantly different from those of the preceding ones. In this chapter, judgement is drawn from fictional characters and fictional expressions. Given the distaste for sexuality in old age discussed in the previous chapter, how did society deal with this category of women? How and why were these women, when they had aged, seen as so repugnant and how did they manage the decline of their physical attractiveness? To understand why these women were seen as different, and why the writers of Roman literature felt free to ridicule them, I shall start by looking briefly at a picture of ideal Roman womanhood.

The role of an ideal Roman matron

The majority of Roman women, from the upper classes to the freed, could expect to become married women, *matronae*, at some stage of their life. A wife and mother had an honourable status and the Roman moralistic sources had a very particular and idealised concept of how she should behave. The jurist Ulpian wrote: ‘We ought to regard as “*materfamilias*” a woman who has not lived dishonorably; for her behaviour separates and distinguishes a *materfamilias* from other women.’¹ A *matrona* should be industrious and dutiful. She looked after the household’s economics, her children’s education and their moral welfare. She also worked ‘with wool’, which had a moral significance synonymous with the leading of a virtuous lifestyle. The *matrona* was expected to be modest, to wear no make-up or adornments and to dress simply.² She had to be obedient to her husband and be faithful and chaste throughout her marriage – and chastity was assumed of a girl before she married. Chastity (*pudicitia*) was one of the most important virtues of

Roman womanhood. In societal and in legal terms, licentiousness in a woman was considered a serious offence.³ As shown in the previous chapter, sex, for married women, was considered only as a necessity for procreation. Chastity and faithfulness, together with obedience, domesticity, moderation and frugality, were seen as traditional female virtues. These ideals – which remained unchanged throughout Roman history – were frequently depicted in moralistic writings and on epitaphs.⁴ It is of note that, although she was expected to be submissive and obedient, a Roman woman fully participated in her family's social life. Of interest is a homily of John Chrysostom, in which he advised how old women were expected to behave:

aged women should dress modestly, be sober. They should love their husbands and children. They should be chaste, keep good homes and be obedient to their husbands.⁵

This proposed way of life in old age is no different from the rules and norms regarding the *matrona* in general and it is of note that a 'respectable' woman was expected to behave with decorum throughout her life. This was different for the Roman male, who was allowed some licence in youth, and also for the young courtesan, who, as I will argue presently, was allowed to break societal rules when she was young and beautiful. Transgression was no longer tolerated, however, when the courtesan had turned old and supposedly ugly.

Invective against old women

As women had to be chaste and modest, it should not come as a surprise that a whole body of sexually explicit literature exists on women who had a connection with the erotic and who had therefore violated the rules and norms of ideal behaviour. Within this body of Roman humour falls a corpus of abuse and invective against old women who were still sexually active. The following themes can be distinguished:

- Fear of old age – the courtesan was still young and beautiful, but the poet played on his mistress's fear of old age in order to get what he wanted.
- The old woman's futile attempts to cover up her ageing in order to remain young looking.
- Descriptions of the old courtesan's reputed insatiable sexual desires (in spite of her alleged sexual repulsiveness), which were seen as a sexual threat to the poet.
- Representations of characters on the fringes of sexual activity, such as the drunken old woman, the old bawd and the witch.

Falling outside these categories, but worth a mention, was a theme based on a conventional ideal of romantic love. The Roman love elegists imagined that

their love for their mistresses would last for ever – into old age, until death.⁶ This is similar to the aspirations expressed by a married couple that their marriage would be happy and long-lasting, as discussed in [Chapter 6](#). It is implied that the poet's long commitment to his beloved was on a par with a marriage. These expressions of eternal love were a poetical convention, both poet and his *puella* were still young and the reality of old age, apart from a few wrinkles and grey hair, was never considered.

Fear of old age

The love poets of the late Republic and the Augustan age made it abundantly clear that only the young and beautiful were seen as love objects. As Propertius suggested 'girls must be in the right season for love'.⁷ The ideal female love object was young and attractive with smooth skin, firm breasts, long flowing hair, firm and voluptuous thighs and a smooth belly. The image of an old woman was almost the exact opposite. Horace described her with a flabby chest, skinny thighs, swollen legs and a spongy belly.⁸ An old woman was seen as ugly and was therefore no longer sexually desirable. As a courtesan, or prostitute, she was to be rejected.⁹

An aged courtesan had therefore passed her usefulness and could no longer expect the attention she received in her younger days. Through her sex appeal, a young and beautiful courtesan was portrayed as having a certain power over the poet. The courtesan – young, beautiful, intelligent and desirable – could decide to whom she would give her favours.¹⁰ She could afford to say no and was often depicted as haughty or cold-hearted. As is argued by Hallett, the love elegists depicted these women – who moved in upper- and upper-middle-class circles – as powerful. They played an active role-reversing, masterful role, usually played by men.¹¹ In old age, however, the roles would revert. The courtesan's power would gradually disappear as she grew older and her physical attractiveness deteriorated. Old age was therefore feared. The poet played on this fear and, in order to get what he wanted, he painted a gloomy image of what the future would have in store for her. The message was 'make the most of your beauty, when you still can, and be nice to me now'.¹² From Propertius (to his mistress Cynthia):

May old age oppress you with the burden of the years you have dissembled, and may ugly wrinkles come upon your beauty. Then, may you wish to tear at the white hairs by the roots, now that the mirror chides you with wrinkles. Shut out yourself in turn, may you suffer another's haughty scorn and, now a crone, complain that what you once did yourself is now done to you.¹³

For Cynthia old age was still some distance away, but Propertius' message is

clear. In old age – when she became ugly – her days of control would be over and it would be her turn to be rejected.

Horace has several variations on the theme of the ageing courtesan.¹⁴ In *Ode* 1.25 his subject matter is conventional; he depicted how an already ageing courtesan, Lydia, would soon turn into a rejected, old and ugly hag. Of interest is the vividness of his images; he, for instance, compared Lydia's unappeased sexual appetite in old age to the frustrated lust of a mare on heat:

Your turn will come, when you are an old rag
in some lonely alley-way, weeping at the insolence of lovers
as the wind from Thrace holds wilder and wilder orgies
between the old moon and the new,

and your burning love, the lust
that drives the mothers of horses to madness
rages round your ulcerous liver.
There will be no shortage of complaints

about cheerful youngsters who take
more pleasure in green ivy and dark myrtle,
and dedicate dry leaves to the east wind,
winter's crony.¹⁵

Another ode (3.15) has inappropriate behaviour as the central theme. Here, an old woman named Chloris refused to give up her erotic play.¹⁶ Horace brought in an extra '*jeu d'esprit*' in that Chloris was a married woman with an impoverished husband, implying that she may have been supplementing the family income.¹⁷ Once again, we are told that love is only for the young. Chloris was not only advised to leave love to her daughter – for whom love would be more seemly – but she was also told what she ought to do instead:

Your place is with the famous wool
shorn round Luceria, not with lyres nor
the crimson flower of the rose nor
casks drained to the dregs – you are an old woman.¹⁸

It is quite apparent that the aged Chloris' days of revelling should be over and that she was expected to revert to a married woman's traditional role and concentrate on conventional womanly virtues. Only young and beautiful courtesans were allowed to stray from a woman's customary deferential role. It was suggested that the courtesans and the mistresses should accept ageing in good grace and retire with dignity, which is also the theme of *Ode* 4.13. This poem is different in tone from the two previous ones, in that in the last few stanzas Horace somewhat tempered his contempt for the aged – and still

active – prostitute, Lyce, by pointing to the transitoriness of life in general and the reflection that age comes to us all.¹⁹ Horace was in his fifties when he wrote this ode, and he saw himself as old. Elsewhere he wrote ‘greying hair mellows the spirit that once relished disputes and violent quarrels’. It may well be that Horace, in the Lyce ode, had himself mellowed a little. He showed some sympathy for Lyce’s pathetic behaviour, a sympathy lacking in the two earlier odes.²⁰

The love elegists and erotic poets, then, made it abundantly clear that love was only for the young and beautiful. Although the mistress was shown as wanton, as a sex-and-fun object she provided a useful service and was therefore excused the transgression against the established traditions of society which was no longer seen as appropriate when she was old and reputedly ugly. The poets scarcely considered what the prostitute should do when her season of love was past – which was, according to the epigrammist Philetas of Samos, around the age of 50.²¹ Some old courtesans became bawds, as will be discussed presently. An older courtesan may have had no choice but to go on, as was realised by Lucilius: ‘If she had no face, if as an old whore and prostitute she needs cash and goes down.’²² There is no doubt that the courtesan’s power and status, which was hers because of her youth, beauty and intellectual accomplishments, declined in ageing.²³ It is of note that the latter (her interest in poetry, her witty conversations, her musical skills, and so on), so praised when she was young, were no longer mentioned once she reached old age. These accomplishments do not usually diminish with ageing, but they appear to be no longer valued.

It is argued among modern anthropologists and sociologists that if a society puts much emphasis on youth and beauty, a woman’s status would decline as she aged.²⁴ At Rome, this would almost certainly have been true for the courtesans and mistresses, but I have found no particular evidence that this was the case for the Roman matron, whose worth was based on motherhood and housekeeping skills. ‘Wives’, said Plutarch, ‘should not rely on their beauty . . . but on conversation, character and comradeship’.²⁵ Ageing, therefore, must have been an ordeal for the prostitutes and courtesans, who were on the fringes of society. At Rome, marriage and life within the family circle would have protected a woman from the scorn and ridicule on the outward appearance of age experienced, for example, by courtesans. A ‘respectable’ (and therefore well-behaving) ageing wife and mother was seldom referred to in disparaging terms; indeed, age and widowhood, at least among the wealthy, tended to increase her status and authority.²⁶

‘Covering up’ of old age

As old age was meant to be the end of a courtesan’s status and livelihood, it is no wonder that the courtesans were said by the poets and satirists to cover up the symptoms of age. The use of cosmetics was especially associated with old

prostitutes; the young were thought not to need it – the male poets preferred to imagine their mistresses as naturally beautiful – and the respectable married woman was supposed to scorn any embellishment.²⁷ Plautus, for example, has a maid scold her young mistress with the words ‘only ancient dames pickle themselves in perfumes, made-up toothless old crones, that try to paint away their blemishes’.²⁸ Paints, hair dye, wigs, even false teeth or eyebrows were claimed to be used in a desperate attempt to hide the effects of ageing.²⁹ Martial portrayed Galla, a promiscuous and completely ‘disguised’ old hag as someone in whom everything was false and put away at night:

You are at home yourself Galla, but you are made up in the middle of the Subura. Your hair is manufactured in your absence. You lay your teeth aside at night, as you do your silks, and lie stored in a hundred caskets. Your face does not sleep with you . . .³⁰

The covering up of old age was seen as futile; the male would not be fooled. From Lucian:

You dye your hair, but you will never dye your old age, or smooth out the wrinkles of your cheeks. Then don’t plaster all your face with white lead, so that you have not a face, but a mask; for it serves no purpose. Why are you out of your wits. Rouge and paste will never turn Hecuba into Helen.³¹

Some old prostitutes were said to behave in a childish way in order to appear young-looking. The epigrammist Myrinus made fun of an old character called Lais, an ancient grandmother ‘as old as a crow and Hecuba put together’, who dyed her white hair and said *tata* to everyone.³² Girlish behaviour was tolerated in the young, but was seen as absurd in the old. Juvenal satirised a very old woman who was said to coo, in public, wanton words in Greek, the language of love, only suited, thought Juvenal, to the bedroom. He wrote: ‘All this may be pardoned in a girl; but will you, who are hard on your 86th year, still talk in Greek? That tongue is not decent in an old woman’s mouth.’³³

The message is repeated over and over: an old courtesan should never attempt to hide the effects of ageing and should retire gracefully, as the courtesan Lais was said to have done. She voluntarily decided to dedicate her mirror to Venus, because she no longer recognised herself in it. Lucian suggested that old prostitutes should cover up and no longer have their wares on show.³⁴ Old prostitutes, therefore, should revert to the virtues of traditional Roman womanhood. Old age, even for such marginal figures as prostitutes, meant behaving with dignity.

The still lustful old woman

Those who did not observe society's requisites invited scorn, and the still wanton ageing courtesan, or prostitute, attracted a large body of invective. A woman who made sexual advance in old age was seen as absurd; she was seen as out of control. The poets, satirists and epigrammists felt therefore free to be extremely vicious in their attack, often in extremely obscene language and images. The old prostitute was depicted as sexually repulsive. She was seen as so revolting that she rendered her victim impotent. Much was made of the old woman's extreme old age. She was said to be even older than Hecuba, Nestor, Tithonus, Priam, or old crows; these legendary or mythological figures, or creatures, were traditionally thought to have lived until an extreme old age.³⁵ The physical state of the old woman's body and the appearance of her genitalia were grossly exaggerated. She was associated with foul smells (of breath and of genitals), staining and wetness. Wetness in women had connotations with lewdness and lack of self-control. Wetness of the mind was thought of as an intellectually deficient condition, as argued by Carson.³⁶ The old prostitute was likened to animals, with nasty sexual connotations, or to particular ugly creatures such as wolves, goats, elephants, frogs, crocodiles, gnats or cows.³⁷

Why was the subject of the randy old woman so common and why were some of the poets so extremely vindictive in their attack? I shall first look at a few examples. Horace produced some of the most virulent invectives on the lascivious old woman found in Roman literature. In *Epode* 8 he depicted an excessively old and over-sexed woman of extreme ugliness. This was not a woman from the gutter, she had Stoic tracts on her silk cushions (lines 15–16). His description of her aged body, and especially of her genitalia, was very vivid. The old woman was so repulsive that she constituted a threat to the narrator's virility. As mentioned before, masculinity had a moral quality and was associated with self-control and power. Horace wrote:

You dare to ask me, you decrepit, stinking slut,
what makes me impotent?
And you with blackened teeth, and so advanced
in age that wrinkles plough your forehead,
your raw and filthy arsehole gaping like a cow's
between your wizened buttocks.
It's your slack breasts that rouse me (I have seen
much better udders on a mare)
your flabby pauch and scrawny thighs
stuck on your swollen ankles . . .³⁸

Epode 12, too, has extremely vivid and virulent images:

What are you after? It's black elephants you should mate with!
 Why send me presents? Why write me letters?
 I'm no sturdy youngster. I don't have a big fat nose.
 But I can sniff the polyp in your nose
 or stinking billy in your hairy armpits quicker
 than keenest hound can scent the wild boar's lair.

The sweat and nasty smell get worse all over
 her wrinkled body, as my penis droops
 and raging passion cools
 and all the while the powdered chalk
 and crocodile-shit dye run on her face as she ruts away,
 breaking the bed and the canopy over it,
 and giving me an earful for being so choosy . . .³⁹

These first two stanzas of this ode depict the narrator's point of view. The direct speech used in the first stanza must have meant that the narrator was in bed with the old woman, who is seen as so revolting that she caused the young narrator's impotence. Later we are informed that his virility was not at stake with a younger woman.⁴⁰ Even the old woman's smell was said to be obnoxious, yet she was hungry for sex. We learn that the old woman was sexually dominant, which was traditionally the male prerogative. In the last stanza Horace let the old woman herself talk, which is uncommon – the Roman writers did not usually attempt to see things from the female's perspective:

You're not so slack when lying with Inachia.
 Inachia you manage three times a night, but you flop
 at the thought of doing me once. To hell with Lesbia
 who gave me a wimp when I looked for a bull, and all the time
 Amyntas of Cos was mine for the taking,
 with a tool in his great loin sturdier than
 a deeply rooted sapling in the mountains.
 You ask what's all the hurry. Who are these woollens for,
 All double steeped in Tyrian dyes? For you, of course,
 so that when you're with your friends, there will be nobody
 whose trollop loves him more than I love you.
 O! I'm so sad. You've run from me like the lamb in panic
 from the wicked wolf, or roe-deer from the lion.⁴¹

It is of interest that, from the male's point of view, Horace concentrated on the old woman's physical loathsomeness. From the old woman's angle, we learn that she did not consider herself to be old and repulsive at all, quite the opposite. She saw herself as sexually attractive – she hinted at a rival lover –

and as strong, beautiful and powerful. She compared herself to a lion and a wolf.⁴² This portrayal, however, only emphasised her absurdity. The old woman sent presents; perhaps the narrator was a so-called captator, a legacy hunter who provided sexual services. Lucian has a similar example where a hungry pauper had to endure the 'graveyard kisses' of a four-toothed 70-year-old hag.⁴³

Horace's vicious defilement of the old woman's body and his ferocity in his depiction of her sexual appetite are likely to have been a literary convention. Horace was only in his early thirties when he wrote his *Epodes*, and, as I proposed before, the young especially were quite disgusted at the idea of sexual relations between the old and the young. The subject might have appealed to him. The motif of the degradation of sexually active old women can be found elsewhere, as, for instance, in the work of Archilochus (seventh century BC, whose work was known to have been admired by Horace, as shown by Fraenkel) and some of the Alexandrian epigrammists.⁴⁴ Horace may have derived some of his motifs and images from these authors. For example, a fragment from Archilochus' work refers to a 'damp crotch'.⁴⁵ The erotic epigrammist Meleager compared an old woman called Timo to an old wreck of a ship; he commiserated with those who had to sail in her. In another epigram he declared the old woman's genitalia to be 'full of bilgewater' and 'flooded with the sea'. In a similar vein, the epigrammist Nicharchus likened an old woman's vagina to a 'white sea'.⁴⁶ Other, also quite rancorous, examples of the degradation of the lascivious old woman can be found in Martial, the *Virgilian Appendix*, the *Carmina Priapea* and in Petronius.⁴⁷ It is clear that sex with an old woman was seen as revolting. Lucilius even declared that he preferred castration to the bedding of an old woman.⁴⁸

There are some instances when older men still saw old women as acceptable; perhaps they were out for what they could get. A humorous example comes from an anonymous epigram: 'Green grape, you refused me, /ripe grape, you sent me packing, /Must you deny me a bite of your raisin now?'⁴⁹ Very occasionally, an old unmarried woman's appearance was still seen as attractive. Philodemus' Charito, although 60 years old, was still thought of as sexually inviting. We learn that this was because age had not withered her; she still had beautiful black hair, a good and unwrinkled body with firm breasts.⁵⁰ The example of Charito underlines that sexual attractiveness depends on looks, not chronological age. This appears still to be true today. Sontag, in an article which considers the double standard of ageing between men and women, argues: 'An older woman is, by definition, sexually repulsive – unless, in fact, she doesn't look old at all.'⁵¹

Physical ugliness was often treated as the target for ridicule and a subject for laughter, as was noted by Cicero.⁵² This would especially be true if the object of ugliness was old and misbehaving.⁵³ On this level, the degrading of the ugly and lascivious old courtesan in obscene language and imagery must be seen as a particular genre of Roman male humour. It is of note that

obscenity in poetry was not seen as offensive in Roman society; it was thought that poetry should be judged on its artistic merit and not on its content. This type of humour created a combination of fascination and disgust in the readers, as argued out by Richlin.⁵⁴ Obscene language was quite usual in certain types of erotic poetry in the Latin language and was derived from Greek and Hellenistic models. Martial, for example, insisted his obscenity was appropriate for the genre of epigrams and that the sexual content of some of his epigrams was meant to provoke laughter.⁵⁵ It is therefore important to keep in mind the cultural setting of the use of obscenities. Disorderly behaviour and transgressive licentious behaviour was, for example, encouraged in rituals and a parallel use of obscenities could be found in some religious festivals, such as the Saturnalia, the Liberalia, the Floralia (a feast especially associated with the wanton behaviour of prostitutes), the feast of Anna Perenna, or at wedding ceremonies. Obscenities were also shouted at triumphs, and sexual humour was found in graffiti, lampoons, gossip, jokes and court-room speeches.⁵⁶

Erotic poems had a titillating effect, but the sexually repulsive, yet still lascivious old woman was distinctly anti-erotic and invited disgust in the poet's audience. Culturally, the thought of sex with a randy old woman was seen as so shocking and revolting that verbal hostility was inevitable. A similarity can be found in what perhaps can be seen as today's equivalent of the obscene poem: the dirty joke. Legman, in looking at the rationale of the dirty joke, argued that taboo actions or subjects can create an effect of shock, offence or laughter and can dispel anxiety. He wrote:

The purpose here is to absorb and control, even to slough off, by means of jocular presentation and laughter, the great anxiety that both teller and listeners feel in connection with certain culturally determined themes . . . For this function, the grosser the vocabulary and the more horrible and excruciating the actual content of the joke or poem, the better it seems to serve.⁵⁷

The use of obscene language and the vicious degradation of the old woman's body by the Roman poets can therefore be seen as conforming to a psychologically explainable pattern.

Of note is the difference in treatment between the randy old man and the randy old woman. The old man in love was abused and ridiculed, but he was also in many instances depicted as a figure of fun.⁵⁸ The lascivious old woman was treated more severely, and was often seen as dangerous and out of control. Lustiness in an old woman was seen as on a par with madness, as, for example, in Martial: 'You have outlasted three hundred consuls. You have four teeth and three hairs. Having buried 200 husbands, you madly (*demens*) look for a man to itch for cinders . . .' Horace depicted Lydia as a '*bacchante*' and a 'mare on heat'.⁵⁹ The distinction deserves closer consideration. For this,

I suggest, we have to turn to the conventional expected behavioural norms for a Roman matron and consider the double standard in the attitude to male and female sexuality.⁶⁰ The Roman matron was expected to be submissive and chaste. After the menopause especially, a woman was seen as an asexual creature. As proposed in the previous chapter, she was expected to limit her sexual activity to the early years of her marriage and procreational purposes, while men, even when older, could still find sexual satisfaction, either by marrying a younger woman or outside the context of marriage with a slave girl, mistress or concubine. At Rome, excessive sexuality in women in general was viewed with animosity. Those women who showed a lust greater than men were depicted as out of control or frantic (*furiosa libido*), as written by Ovid.⁶¹

What was particularly striking in the poets' depiction of the lustful old woman was her sexual ferocity and her dominance. It was the old woman who made the sexual advances, thereby challenging the male's masculinity. Her behaviour was in complete contrast to the chaste and submissive behaviour expected of an older respectable matron. The randy old woman was therefore considered out of control and her behaviour seen as threatening to men. Mockery, scurrilous language and imagery gave vent to fear of female domination and the transgression of societal norms. By ridiculing, abusing and rejecting the old woman, the poet reinstated his own – and his audience's – male dominance and moral superiority. Some feminist scholars also bring a fear of female genitalia into the relationship between the poet and the courtesan. This fear is explained in modern psychology as fear of female domination, the so-called '*vagina dentata*' (literally the fear of being 'locked-in').⁶²

The subject of the degradation of the randy old woman must have appealed to Roman readers, as can be judged from the large body of writings on this topos. Of interest is the readership of these often obscene poems. Pliny admitted that he enjoyed reading and writing racy epigrams and Sotadic verses (after the Alexandrian iambic poet), which 'made him laugh and relax'. He implied that erotic verses were written by many illustrious Romans, including Cicero, C. Calvus, Pollio, Mesalla, Hortensius, Seneca, Caesar, Augustus and others.⁶³ Poets wrote for a kindred audience, and it would be hard to imagine that the protected – and supposedly chaste – Roman *matrona* would read this type of poetry. Yet women were said to enjoy reading erotic and obscene poetry. Martial suggested that even chaste girls and matrons were eagerly reading his more risqué verses.⁶⁴ But was this still acceptable for old women? As the distaste for old women and sex was seen to be very persuasive, I agree with a proposition by Hemelrijk, who argued that, although the love poets and Martial welcomed women as readers, in old women interest in love and sexuality was thought to be despicable. She suggested that the older *matrona* was expected to show an interest in more dignified literature, such as philosophical and moral treatises.⁶⁵

The drunken old woman

Drunkenness in women was seen as a serious offence in Roman moralistic writing, and excessive drinking by women was despised: 'A woman lying steeped in wine is an ugly sight', as Ovid put it.⁶⁶ It was thought to lead to out-of-the-ordinary behaviour and sexual extravagance. The early Romans reputedly forbade women to drink wine, a crime they saw as on a par with adultery.⁶⁷ Yet both in the fictional writings and in visual imagery old women are frequently portrayed as inordinate imbibers.

Fictional writing

In the more popular literary sources, the figure of the drunken old woman (*anus ebria*) became almost proverbial. Lucilius, for example, wrote: '*anus rursum ad armillum*'.⁶⁸ As a type, she was incapable of self-control and she was said to consume vast quantities of strong unmixed wine.⁶⁹ The drunken old woman was often portrayed as a funny and burlesque figure, but her uncontrolled behaviour had more serious undertones, as, for example, in an Alexandrian epigram which featured a drunken character called Maronis:

This is the grave of grey-haired Maronis
on which you'll observe a carved stone goblet.
Tippler and gossip, she's not at all sorry
either for her children or destitute husband.
Though dead and buried, one thing still irks her
that the emblem of Bacchus the wine god's
not full to the brim with good wine.⁷⁰

Maronis was a figure of fun, but the epigram also highlights a more serious problem. The drunken old woman neglected her husband and children and failed to fulfil her traditional role and duty in life. Plautus has a similar character in the figure of the old nurse Leaena. She was supplied with a huge quantity of strong wine by a young lover, so that he could meet his beloved. Leaena was said to be so fond of wine that she was able to sniff it out even from behind closed doors:

Ah, the sweet, sweet whiff of old wine that met my nostrils. It drew me out here in the dark, I love it so, I want it so! Wherever it is, it's near me. Ah there, sweetheart mine, beauty of Bacchus! You are old and I'm old, and how I want you!'.⁷¹

She must have made a comic picture, sniffing about on stage like a dog, but Leaena too neglected her duty and failed to look after the virtue of the girl she was supposed to protect. These humorous depictions therefore also

contain social criticism. Drunkenness in general was seen as a double-edged sword, mingling ecstatic happiness with sadness and fear, as expressed by Horace.⁷² Drunkenness was thought to lead to senseless behaviour and affected the intellect.⁷³ Roman writers did not usually concern themselves with the social or psychological reasons of why old women might have turned to drink, but it was hinted at by Horace when he depicted how the lonely and rejected old courtesan Lyce had turned to hard drinking for solace. In a different context, he suggested that wine would bring oblivion from the cares of the world.⁷⁴ It is of interest that in contemporary society, depression, isolation and loneliness were most frequently mentioned as the reasons of why old people had drinking problems – the very reasons why the old courtesan Lyce was said to have turned to drink.⁷⁵

Closely related to the figure of the ‘drunken old woman’ is the bawd (*lena*). The poets saw her as an old woman in charge of a girl who gave sexual favours. She was financially reliant on her girl, and she may have been an aged prostitute or courtesan.⁷⁶ The bawd was a social outsider. She was commonly depicted as drunk, and in some instances she was also lustful or dabbled in magic. Everything she did was in excess. Propertius’ bawd Acanthis is an archetype.⁷⁷ She was depicted as a typically aged woman with a wrinkled throat, decayed teeth and scanty hair. Her name was an allusion to the acanthus, a prickly plant which induced thirst. She also practised witchcraft, threatening the narrator’s virility. She was wild and uncontrolled; the narrator felt threatened by her behaviour and cursed her. Ovid has a similar character named Dipsas. She too was both bawd and witch and was never sober. As pointed out by Myers, her name means ‘thirst’ in Greek, but in Latin *dipsada* refers to a small poisonous viper, which was thought to suffer from extreme thirst, which it in turn inflicted on its victims. Her name, therefore, reflects both her drunkenness and her evil and unnatural disposition.⁷⁸ Dominant, drunk and out of control, the bawds Acanthis and Dipsas embodied the prototype of all a Roman male feared in the female sex and were viewed with particular animosity.⁷⁹

Visual imagery

The *anus ebria* was also a common type in visual imagery.⁸⁰ Many of the sculptures, and occasionally also drinking vessels, represented these women as followers of the god Bacchus, as can be learned from their dress – they were bare-shouldered or even bare-breasted – and attributes, such as ivy leaves. In contrast, the respectable Roman matron was always well-covered by the stola in public. The Bacchantes had a reputation for sexual licence and their delirious religious experiences and rumours of lewd behaviour were seen as alarming to the Romans.⁸¹ Ovid suggested that old women in particular were followers of Bacchus, because at that age they were more addicted to wine.⁸² In some of the visual imagery, the old women were

shown as being capable of drinking enormous quantities of wine – as emphasised by the inclusion of huge drinking vessels. The women's faces generally show an enraptured expression; some have their mouths open in a suggestion of bawdiness – the Bacchanalia were reputedly rowdy affairs. Others show only sadness and misery, as, for example, on a bronze bottle, now in the Louvre. It is evident that these women had turned to a dissolute life.

It is not quite clear who these women represented. They may well have been old courtesans, but some scholars – such as Sande and Zanker – have pointed out that they appear well-off and do not look derelict. They are well-coiffed, and some wear jewellery or elaborate headdresses. In some cases, a shoulder strap is visible, which may have been part of the stola. They might therefore represent women from the upper or middle classes.⁸³ Whatever their social status, these women were depicted as the antithesis of Roman womanhood. Like their literary counterparts, they were out of control, in dress and in behaviour. One of the best-known examples is a Roman copy of a Hellenistic original (Plate 13). The old woman is depicted holding a vast bottle in both hands; she is obviously drunk and her face shows an ecstatic expression. Paradoxically, the physical symptoms of old age are emphasised and exaggerated; her body is frighteningly wrinkled, thin and emaciated, her flesh sagging, her mouth is toothless. The drunken old woman emanates both rapture and distress, representative of the two sides of drunkenness. One can't help but wonder, was drink her only comfort?

Why were there so many examples of drunken old women both in the literary sources and in visual imagery? Some examples can be cited of public drunkenness among women in Roman society. Seneca, for example, writing in the first century AD, noted increased drunkenness in women and Juvenal wrote that women got drunk at religious festivals and ceremonies.⁸⁴ There is, however, little concrete evidence that drunkenness among old women was a particular problem in ancient Rome. The *anus ebria* must be seen as part of the corpus of invective against old women; there was a precedent in Greek and Hellenistic writings and visual arts.⁸⁵ It is likely, however, that in order to have meaning for the audience these texts and images had some connection with reality. It cannot be ruled out that drunkenness, especially among old women like Horace's prostitute Lyce, was quite common.⁸⁶ As mentioned above, contemporary research into the drinking habits of the elderly revealed that the reasons for drinking were age-related, such as depression, loneliness, isolation, bereavement and boredom.⁸⁷ In Rome, it might therefore have been those old women who had been marginalised by society and who were therefore lonely and neglected – such as the old prostitutes of the literary sources – who had drinking problems in real life. It cannot, however, be inferred that drink problems were confined to this class of old woman.



Plate 13 Roman copy of a Hellenistic original, featuring a drunken old woman. Her decrepitude is emphasised by her thin and emaciated body, sagging flesh and exaggerated wrinkles, her excessive thirst by the size of the jar. Musei Vaticani, Rome.



Plate 13 continued.

The witch

The witch (*striga* or *saga*) was another common stereotypical figure found within the corpus of invective against old women. Examples can be found in the writings of Tibullus, Propertius, Horace, Ovid, Apuleius and Petronius.⁸⁸ In real-life representations, old women of doubtful reputation were associated with the making of love potions and the foretelling of the future.

They were also said to dabble in magic. Many of the educated showed a scepticism towards fortune-telling old women and considered them as charlatans. Cicero, for example, described fortune-telling as mere baseless figments of imagination and Seneca advised a husband to keep his wife away from an old woman who practised magic (*anus et aruspices et hariolos*).⁸⁹ However, magic could be used in socially approved circumstances. Some old women were said to perform quasi-magical rites, perhaps in order to purify a sick-room, or used herbs for medicinal purposes; so the old woman's skills with herbs and potions were not always seen as negative.⁹⁰ A distinction should also be made between the magic and fortune-telling practised by old women and the fortune-telling performed by prophetesses, who were seen as legitimate (such as, for example, the Sibyl of Cumae). We are told by Lucan that witchcraft was abominated by the gods, since witches were said to consult Pluto or the shades below – while religious fortune-telling was god-sanctioned.⁹¹

The fictional witches were commonly depicted as old, hag-faced and evil.⁹² They were frightful figures of a fearsome and wild physique, which was symbolic of their malicious and chaotic nature. Horace's witch Canidia, for example, was said to have wild hair, entwined with deadly snakes (like the Furies), while Ovid's witch Dipsas had double-pupilled eyes.⁹³ Witches were depicted as forceful and domineering; they vexed human souls and could bend other people to their will.⁹⁴ Their magical powers were seen as mysterious, sinister and disturbing. Witches were associated with vampirism.⁹⁵ They were thought to have powers over natural phenomena. Ovid's witch Dipsas, for instance, could make the stars and the moon bleed and gather clouds over the whole sky. Propertius' witch Acanthis could bewitch the moon.⁹⁶ They could change themselves, or others, into animals: Dipsas changed herself into a screech owl, and Acanthis nightly became a prowling wolf. As has been shown, the word 'wolf' was also used for a prostitute, with all its implications of sexual wantonness.⁹⁷ Witches operated in the darkness of the night, symbolic of their malevolent powers.⁹⁸ They were said to use the entrails of the dead for their potions and they practised necromancy.⁹⁹ Witches were also connected with love and sexuality; they dealt in arousing or suppressing the passions and their spells and potions could either cause or cure male impotence.¹⁰⁰ Some witches, although old and hag-faced, were themselves still unsuitably lustful.

Old witches were thought to be guilty of female dominance and excessive behaviour. Witches embodied the abandoned strong emotion and perverted behaviour respectable Romans found disturbing and feared.¹⁰¹ Horace's witch Canidia presented probably the most dramatic example.¹⁰² In *Satire* 1.8, the witch Canidia and her friend Sagana were practising their fearful rites in a converted graveyard in front of a wooden statue of Priapus; even the god became frightened and accidentally farted.¹⁰³ The loud noise startled Canidia and Sagana. They fled, losing their teeth and wigs amongst peals of

laughter, exposing themselves for what they were – giggling old crones. However, in Horace's *Epodes*, Canidia was an altogether more sinister figure. In *Epode* 5, she was not only shown to be unsuitably lustful but also intended to sacrifice a young boy's life by using his liver and marrow in a magic spell in order to lure a wandering lover back home.¹⁰⁴ The boy, from a senatorial background, was to die by slow starvation in order to satisfy Canidia's sexual desires. He appealed for his life, invoking Lucina the goddess of childbirth, but his plea was ignored. Canidia was everything a Roman woman should not be. She was lustful, perverted, sordid and squalid.¹⁰⁵ Canidia's old age was implied by her name – which is suggestive of *canities* (hoariness), as pointed out by Oliensis. Her age was emphasised by her appearance, she was depicted with blackened teeth and yellow skin.¹⁰⁶ Canidia and her helpmates, the witches Sagana, Veia and Folia, were the antitheses of the traditional Roman female in their sins against society. Their reckoning was predicted in the boy's final curse: they were to be haunted, stoned, their bones crushed and left unburied, so their souls would not find peace in the Underworld. The character of Canidia reappears in *Epode* 17, where again her dominant malevolence was emphasised.

Horace's witches were likely to have been a literary construct; witches also appeared in Greek comedy and iambic poetry.¹⁰⁷ Personal feelings often intermingle with societal prejudices and literary creations, and it is possible that Horace felt strongly about the black magic which was said to have been practised in the backstreets of Rome.¹⁰⁸ Accusations of poisoning rivals in love or politics, or the removal of unwanted lovers or husbands, were not unusual in Rome and examples can be found both in the literary and the historical sources.¹⁰⁹ In the popular view, magic spells and curses were believed to work. Tacitus, for example, noted that in popular belief the death of Germanicus was thought to have been caused by a spell.¹¹⁰ Old women were frequently thought to be the suppliers of herbs, love potions and other potions. They were also associated with abortifacients carried out with the help of sharp instruments or herbs.¹¹¹ The selling of love potions, poisons and abortifacients was a serious offence and punished with matching severity. In the first century AD, the *lex Cornelia* on murderers and poisoners stated that 'someone is punished who makes, sells, or possesses a drug for the purpose of homicide'.¹¹² The decree also incorporated dealers in cosmetics, if they recklessly handed over to anyone poisonous substances such as hemlock, salamander, monkshood and pinegrubs. The penalties were severe: deportation to an island and forfeiture of all property.¹¹³ If death followed the administration of an abortifacient or an aphrodisiac, whether death was intentional or not, the crime was classified as poisoning. The person administering the potion was held responsible and could be accused of poisoning or evil magic.¹¹⁴ Under Constantine, poisoning and casting spells were among a number of valid reasons for repudiating a wife.¹¹⁵

The poets' denunciations of the witch and her malevolent magical

dabblings in Roman literary writings would have struck a social chord.¹¹⁶ Fear of poisoning, of superstition and magic spells must have been real enough, contributing to the poets' perception of characters like Canidia. But this was not the only reason. In many ancient and pre-industrial societies, certain categories of old women – those who were not part of a household and were not under the control of a man, and therefore standing outside society – were often feared. Lone and old women were frequently marginalised and made into victims. They were seen as ugly and weird; hence the creation of witch-like figures. The figure of the witch can be found in the folk history and religion of many cultures.¹¹⁷ In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe the marginalisation of old women led to accusations of witchcraft, resulting in witch-hunts and prosecutions. The victims were often accused of lewd behaviour and of coupling with the devil.¹¹⁸

At Rome, too, lone old women, often poor and from the lower strata of society, were depicted as outsiders. In Roman ideology, women in general were seen as more marginal figures than men. Men were considered as self-controlled, dominant and assertive, while women were believed to lack self-control and to play a passive role. The lone old woman was therefore trebly marginalised – she was old (and no longer considered as useful), female and nobody's wife, mother or sister. This made her into a scapegoat and led to the invention of witchlike figures and other similar characters, such as the randy old woman, the ugly old bawd and the *anus ebria*. These characters embodied every kind of extreme emotion and uncontrolled behaviour feared in Roman society. The old woman's supposedly female weaknesses were exaggerated and caricatured. Such women were fictional characters – stereotypes which did not depict how old women typically behaved. It is of interest that stereotyping of old women still takes place in today's society, and women naturally resent such stereotypes. A discussion group of women over 60 – published in 1990 on the subject of the stereotyping of old women – were said to have complained: 'We are not your mothers . . . We are neither witch, old hag, or role model, though we can have moments of acting like any or all of these.'¹¹⁹ Women's reaction to stereotyping in ancient Rome is, unfortunately, not known, but was, perhaps, not dissimilar.

FAMILY

This chapter deals with family issues. The relationship between aged parents and their adult offspring is considered primarily through the legal concept of *patria potestas* and the virtue of *pietas*. *Patria potestas* was, as can be learned from the jurist Gaius, a peculiarly Roman institution whereby the oldest male member of the family – usually the father, and referred to as the *paterfamilias* – had extensive legal powers over his children for as long as he lived. How did an older father exercise these theoretical legal powers over his adult children and how did these powers affect their relationship? What was the relationship between the Roman mother, who lacked any such legal authority, and her adult offspring? What impact did the virtue of *pietas* – described by Saller as a ‘blend of affection and duty’ – have on the emotional relationship between aged parents and their adult children?¹ In what way can *pietas* be seen as the foundation on which economic support of aged parents was based?

Parental authority

The father

The institution of *patria potestas* bestowed on the father extensive legal powers.² One of the most important of these powers was ownership and control of all property from which most income was derived. Income could also be obtained from other economic activities, but salaried work was relatively rare.³ Even gifts, bequests, and so on, acquired by a *filiusfamilias*, became the property of the father, who disposed of them only through a will. The father’s powers lasted until his death, thus making, in theory at least, even mature adult sons financially dependent on their fathers for as long as their fathers were alive. This situation is so unusual to modern eyes, used to a wage-earning economy, that some scholars, such as, for example, Daube (1969) and Veyne (1987), have suggested that the relationship between fathers and their adult sons were fraught with difficulty. Veyne went so far as to say that fathers were hated by their sons to the point of parricide, and that

sons could not wait for their fathers to die so they could be financially independent.⁴ These scholars tended to concentrate on the legal aspects of *patria potestas*. More recently, social practice too has been taken into consideration. Gardner, for example, wrote 'the powers of the *pater familias* were a legal construct, not the essence of Roman family life'.⁵ It can be seen that the extensive legal powers bestowed to the father under *patria potestas* could be mitigated by a number of different measures, which I shall discuss presently, and that there were therefore few practical reasons for serious disputes over day-to-day financial matters between fathers and sons.

No doubt there were family disagreements. Literary sources, especially the comedies of Plautus and Terence, show many examples of squabbles over spending and behaviour between fathers – who were referred to as '*senes*' – and their unmarried sons.⁶ Sons were often depicted as spending too much money on clothes and gambling, and as wasting their time womanising. Pliny, for example, depicts a father who got into conflict with his adolescent son, who had overspent on horses and dogs; Pliny reprimanded the father for being too hard on his son.⁷ Undue strictness could therefore be moderated by friends or social constraints. Arguments over overspending were likely to have occurred fairly frequently in real life and were typical of generational conflicts between fathers and adolescent sons, and are common to many cultures and many ages. This type of conflict was therefore not necessarily a result of the Roman institution of *patria potestas*. So is there any concrete evidence of serious disputes between fathers and older sons due to the construct of *patria potestas*?

Firstly, the impact of *patria potestas* was partly mitigated by demographic causes in that not many middle-aged sons would have had a father alive. Saller argues that, optimistically, only 20 per cent of 40-year-olds had a living father; more pessimistically, 90 per cent of 40-year-olds would have been fatherless.⁸ Secondly, in practice, an adult son might not have been as dependent on the father for day-to-day expenditure as legal testimony would have us believe. There were ways round the legal obstacles of *patria potestas* and, over time, the more extreme measures of *patria potestas* were legally modified.

Sons may have been in possession of an allowance (*peculium*). Not much is known about the use of the *peculium* or how large this sum was; some scholars, such as Hopkins, saw it as mere pocket money.⁹ This may have been the case for quite young sons, but Caelius, who was unmarried, about thirty years old and living in his own property, was certainly not short of spending money, as is shown in Cicero's *pro Caelio*.¹⁰ The amount of the *peculium* was dependent on the father, and many fathers appear to have been generous to their sons. The giving of a decent *peculium* improved the status of the father, as can be learned from Cicero: 'It is a matter both of duty and of reputation to me to see that Marcus wants for nothing.'¹¹ Cicero's son Marcus, at not yet 20 years of age, already had a very generous allowance – said by Cicero to be

in line with those of his peer group – for living expenses on his study tour to Athens.¹² If young, unmarried sons were not short of spending money it is unlikely that older, middle-aged sons were financially disadvantaged.

A *peculium* could consist of an annual allowance or perhaps *de facto* ownership of property, which could be managed at the son's own discretion. Kaser, for example, gives the impression – gained from legal sources – that sons were free to administer the *peculium*, and Gardner suggests that there is no reason why sons could not use their allowance to make economic profit and live on the income.¹³ An example can be found in Sextus Roscius of Ameria, who was in his forties, and who had, according to Cicero, three farms of his own to manage, of which he had the usufruct. This arrangement was seen by Cicero as a sign of esteem and trust between father and son.¹⁴ Outside of Rome, sons often managed outlying property.¹⁵ A *peculium* would enable a son to make contractual obligations and could be used in business and public affairs; it could also be used as a security in order to finance the *cursus honorum*.¹⁶ Sons could also expect gifts from mothers, and on marriage a young man could also make use of his wife's dowry. Adult sons, therefore, were unlikely to be without funds of their own and, in general, there appear to have been good working relationships between fathers and adult sons. There is, however, also evidence of usually young men, who when short of money borrowed against the expectations of paternal inheritance at exorbitant interest rates.

A father could also emancipate a son (*emancipatio*; literally 'throwing out'). This constitutes a technical release from *patria potestas* by a voluntary renunciation by the father. On emancipation, the son became legally independent (*sui iuris*) and could therefore inherit and own property. He then had to look after himself financially and, in the early Republic, he had no right of inheritance if the father died intestate.¹⁷ From the late Republic, however, a praetor's edict brought emancipated children into intestate succession and gave them the right of maintenance from the *paterfamilias* if they were in need. Such measures suggest that even emancipated sons were still viewed by society as part of the family. A father could hand over property to his emancipated son during his lifetime, but instances of this are rare.¹⁸ The financial dependence of mature sons on their fathers, noted by some modern scholars, may have been overemphasised and therefore did not constitute a basis for serious disagreements between father and sons. Besides, at Rome older sons usually lived in a separate household from their fathers, which would have eased everyday father–son tensions. Daughters, too, if they married *sine manu* – and were therefore legally in their fathers' *potestas* – were largely independent of their fathers after they married, as they would have received a dowry and possibly also a *peculium*.¹⁹

It is inevitable, however, that property ownership gave the father practical financial advantages. Legally, only the father could own property and only the father could control the income and dispose of the property in his will.²⁰

It was the father who held the financial purse strings, and the son depended on his goodwill. If there were any tensions, this could give the father a certain control over his son's behaviour, even if his son was a middle-aged adult. A father could, for example, revoke his son's *peculium* at any time or he could threaten a misbehaving son with disinheritance. Instances of this happening are rare.²¹ In practice, public opinion made the revoking of a *peculium* or disinheritance a last resort. Seneca wrote:

Does any father in his senses disinherit his son for his first offence? Only when great and repeated wrongdoing has overcome his patience, only when what he fears outweighs what he reprimands, does he resort to the decisive pen, but first he makes an effort to reclaim a character that is still unformed, though inclined now to the more evil side; when the case is hopeless, he tries extreme measures. No one resorts to the exaction of punishment until he has exhausted all the means of correction.²²

The wording suggests that we are dealing with younger offspring here. Besides, disinherited children could claim through the courts if their father had not left them at least a quarter of their intestate share without a good reason (*querela inofficiosi testamenti*).²³

It can nevertheless be established that the father's role was an authoritative one, which lasted as long as he lived – even an aged father had legal authority over his mature sons. There is, however, no evidence that many fathers exploited the powers bestowed on them; a father usually had his children's best interest at heart. Seneca, for example, wrote: 'A father's power is most forbearing in its care for the interests of his children and subordinates his own to theirs.'²⁴ Undue strictness on the part of the father was likely to have been moderated by social restraints. A very extreme case comes from Seneca, who related the incident of Tricho, an *eques*, who had flogged his son to death and barely escaped with his life when an angry crowd attacked him in the Forum.²⁵ More usually, serious disputes between father and son were expected to be resolved by a family *consilium* which could act as a family court. The holding of a *consilium* was not a legal requirement, but social practice required a father to seek advice.²⁶ Under the Republic, censors could intervene in the case of too severe filial punishments by a *paterfamilias*; during the Empire, a similar role was taken by the emperors, who took measures against excessively strict fathers. The emperor Trajan, for example, forced a father who ill-treated his son to emancipate him.²⁷

In reality, at Rome, as in most societies and cultures, there was a variety of leniency and strictness among fathers, depending on individual preferences. Examples of both strict and lenient fathers can be found.²⁸ Most of the examples of authoritarian fathers came from the legendary and historical era. The conception of the authoritarian father of the early Romans was, however,



Plate 14 Portrait of an older and a younger man, late first century BC. The facial likeness suggests a father and son relationship. The older man's age is shown by accentuated cheekbones, wrinkles and deep lines from nose to chin. The difference in generations is also shown in the style of the toga: the older person has fewer pleats on the shoulder than the younger one, who wears a more fashionable, fuller toga. Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome.

based on the stereotypical examples of later authors. These fathers were held up as exemplars of the *mos maiorum*, and were associated with a time when the Romans were thought to lead simple lives and were more virtuous and less indulgent than the Romans of their own era.²⁹ In this light, the strictness of early Roman fathers was idealised and seen to be in the best interest of their children, and sons and daughters were depicted as respectful and obedient. An example of a father who still exerted his authority, even when blind and in extreme old age (*caecus et senex*), was Appius Claudius (fourth century BC), as can be learned from Cicero. Cicero, writing three centuries later, wrote that he demanded 'not mere authority, but absolute command over his household'.³⁰ His household included his four adult sons and his five adult daughters. Cicero made no mention of any family conflicts over this paternal control, which, to modern eyes, appears extraordinary. On the contrary, Appius' sons and daughters – driven by *pietas* – were said by Cicero to have accepted their aged father's strict authority and respected and loved him.³¹

However, Cicero, who had delighted in Appius Claudius' long-lasting strict authority, is known to have been an indulgent father himself, as can be judged from his letters to Atticus.³² Perhaps a different age called for different manners, a concept which was hinted at by Cicero himself. In his attack on Clodia (in his defence of Caelius), he contrasted the 'severe, solemn, old-fashioned manner' of earlier times, with the 'mild, gentle, and modern day manner' of his own.³³ This would suggest a gradual change in paternal strictness over a period of time, as is argued by some scholars – for example, Dixon and Eyben.³⁴ From the late Republic, we also find a more public declaration of love and affection between parents and their children. By the third century, the law caught up with social conventions; the jurist Ulpian (or Marcianus) wrote the maxim 'paternal power must be based on love, not cruelty'.³⁵

Although there is little evidence of particularly strained aged father and mature son relationships in the sources, no doubt many sons would have found the financial reliance on their fathers troublesome from time to time. But Roman sons appear, on the whole, to have accepted the subordinate position enforced on them by the institution of *patria potestas*. The tradition was long lasting. Established in Rome's early law of the Twelve Tables and persisting, with some modifications, to the end of antiquity and beyond, the institution of *patria potestas* was ingrained in the very fabric of Roman society.³⁶ It was thought to create stability. The Romans were a pragmatic people and when, over time, a certain aspect of *patria potestas* no longer suited, it was moderated. At first, social practice created mitigating measures, which were eventually incorporated in law. It was seen as natural for 'children' of all ages, including those of middle age or even old age, to be obedient to their parents as long as they lived, strange as this may seem to many contemporary western societies. As it was traditional that children

should obey their fathers, the Roman texts did not usually mention specific ages, whenever father and son relationships were under discussion, either in the legal or other literary texts. From the context, it is not always clear whether we are dealing with adolescent sons and middle-aged fathers, or older sons and aged fathers. It is likely that the degree of paternal authority would have varied over the course of a son's life.³⁷ As far as can be established from the available sources, the institution of *patria potestas* does not appear to have caused any particularly serious aged father and older son conflicts.³⁸ This is not to negate the existence of family tensions, but they appear to be no worse in Rome than in any other pre-industrial society, as is also argued by Saller.³⁹

So far I have investigated how *patria potestas* could have inconvenienced sons and the ways social convention and family feeling mitigated the legal system. The construct of *patria potestas* could also be burdensome for fathers. Life-long family commitment could have been seen as an encumbrance by an aged father, who would have had family responsibilities for as long as he lived. In practice, old and frail fathers were likely to have delegated much of the day-to-day decision-making to their sons or business managers, but the accountability for the management of estates and the worries of looking after households would have been theirs. That the duty of caring for his family's financial affairs might have been too much for an aged father was, however, not often considered in the ancient sources. There must have been some awareness of it, because legally allowances were made for the physically feeble old man for whom family commitments might have been a burden. Ulpian stated that a man 'worn out with old age' (*aut aetate fessus*) could legally transfer some or all of his property as a gift *causa mortis* (made in anticipation of death) to his son, whether still in *potestas* or emancipated, and the gift could take effect immediately.⁴⁰ Some arrangements were therefore made for a physically tired father who was no longer able to fulfil his social role within the family. Arrangements were also made for fathers incapacitated by senile dementia, which was discussed in [Chapter 2](#).

The mother

A mother had no legal powers over her adult offspring, but mothers too can be seen to have asserted authority over their adult children. The virtue of *pietas* called for respect for parents, and for age in general, and applied equally to mothers and fathers. As the jurist Ulpian noted: 'For *pietas* is owed equally to both parents, although their power is not equal.'⁴¹ This section will concentrate on the authoritative aspect of *pietas* and examine how a mother from the Roman elite could expect life-long deference from her children through the virtue of *pietas*, aided by her wealth, her family connections and her strength of personality.

Received morality indicated that a mother was entitled to respect and

obedience from her adult children throughout her life. Besides, although she had no legal powers, an upper-class mother too could have some bargaining tools in order to coerce reluctant children into obedience. A widowed mother especially could enjoy considerable wealth, which was likely to have strengthened her authority. Cicero, for example, wrote that it would be good for his son Marcus to visit his divorced mother Terentia because 'he has some interest in appearing to have wished to please her'.⁴² Roman women had a large amount of testamentary freedom, although social convention would expect her children – both sons and daughters – to inherit.⁴³ Mothers could distinguish between their children, however, which could have been used by a strong-willed mother as a leverage to deference.⁴⁴ A mother could also make use of her ancestral family, or her husband's status, to further a son's political career and could well have demanded obedience in return.

I shall explore two case studies, in which an elderly mother used her ancestry, or her husband's status and power, as a bargaining tool to exercise control over her adult son. The first example, Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, is of interest because she attempted to use not only her role as a mother but also her age in order to intimidate her son into deference. The second example, that of the empress Livia, has been chosen because of her extreme old age when she endeavoured to use her authority over her son Tiberius, himself an old man, in order to gain political power for herself.⁴⁵ During this period, Livia was in her seventies and eighties; Tiberius was in his sixties and early seventies.

In this section too I therefore concentrate on the relationship between mothers and their sons rather than their daughters. Because of the nature of Rome's male-orientated society, less is known about the relationship between mothers and daughters, and case studies, such as those featured below, are less feasible. It is known, however, that a mother had considerable influence in the life of her adult daughters. For instance, she could be engaged in the choice of her daughter's marriage partner(s), as is shown in Terentia's involvement in the choice of the third marriage partner, Dolabella, for her daughter Tullia (Cicero's choice of husband was overruled by mother and daughter).⁴⁶ Or the mother could be instrumental in instigating her daughter's divorce, as demonstrated by Metella, Sulla's wife, who – in conjunction with her husband – was said to have instigated the divorce of her pregnant daughter Aemilia – Sulla's stepdaughter, who was married to M. Acilius Glabrio – in order to enable Aemilia to marry Pompey, a marriage which suited the recently formed political union between Sulla and Pompey.⁴⁷

My first case study concerns Cornelia, daughter of Scipio Africanus, who was married to Ti. Sempronius Gracchus. Of her eleven or twelve children, only three survived into adulthood. After the death of her husband, she never remarried and was said to have devoted her time to the education of her children. Cornelia's reputation as a mother depended partly on her refusal to

marry Ptolemy, so that she could concentrate on her role as a mother. Her status as *univira* reinforced her role as a mother and increased her influence over her children.⁴⁸ She used her wealth and influence to encourage her sons, Tiberius and Gaius, in their careers. In exchange, she expected some influence in their political lives. In some instances her sons were known to have obliged. Tiberius was said to have been urged on to propose his (agrarian) laws by his mother's reproach that she was known as the mother-in-law of Scipio, not as the mother of the Gracchi. Gaius reputedly admitted to having withdrawn a law affecting the former tribune Marcus Octavius, branding him with infamy, at the request of Cornelia.⁴⁹

In old age, Cornelia not only used her role as a mother but also her age in order to bully her one remaining son, Gaius, into submission to her will. An extract from a letter to her son, who was in his thirties at the time, showed in no uncertain terms that she was displeased with his plan to stand for the tribunate. She warned him not to continue the revolutionary policies of his brother Tiberius, which had ended in his assassination. Cornelia wrote:

I swear that except for the assassins of Tiberius Gracchus, you have recently caused me more trouble and annoyance than any enemy – you who should, as my only surviving child, have striven to cause me as little anxiety as possible in my old age; who should only have wanted to please me; who should consider it wicked to disregard my advice in any important matter, especially as so little of my life is left to me. Cannot even that brief time dissuade you from opposing me and ruining the Republic?⁵⁰

This extract appeared in the manuscripts of the first century BC biographer Cornelius Nepos. Its authenticity is doubtful and these were probably not Cornelia's exact words; it is likely, however, that the tone of the letter and her sentiments were genuine.⁵¹ Cornelia, who would have been in her seventies at the time, clearly expected that she, as an elderly mother, could intervene in her son's political career and correct his behaviour. She used considerable emotional pressure to achieve this.⁵² Social convention would have pressurised Gaius to bow to her age and status as a mother – and, as shown above, Gaius had heeded his mother's advice before. On this occasion, however, Gaius ignored his mother's castigation and stood for the tribunate.

Cornelia's authority depended on received morality (*pietas*) which had no legal base; therefore even an aged mother could ultimately be defied and a son could go his own way.⁵³ (A father could have withdrawn all financial support or could have threatened disinheritance.) However, the seemingly major disagreement between Gaius and the elderly Cornelia did not, apparently, sour their relationship. Cornelia may have co-operated with Gaius politically when he was elected to the tribunate.⁵⁴ Her own status would have been augmented by her sons' political prestige and, having outlived

both Tiberius and Gaius, she continued to speak well of them both.⁵⁵ Cornelia was known to have taken her role as mother seriously, and in her old age she commanded the title 'mother of the Gracchi' (*mater Gracchorum*), which was inscribed on a statue which was set up later in a public place as a mark of respect for her status. The base of the statue is still extant.⁵⁶

Livia is another example of a mother who reputedly expected political sway for herself after promoting her son's career.⁵⁷ She gives the impression of a feisty old woman who did not let age stand in the way of her own political ambitions. She was said to have pressed Augustus to adopt Tiberius to make him his heir. When Augustus died, Livia – then an elderly woman of about 72 – took charge. She concealed her husband's death, and by having Tiberius recalled from Illyricum made sure that Tiberius could be in control of the Empire.⁵⁸ Livia expected to be repaid and demanded political power for herself. Dio emphasised Livia's political ambitions and stated that Livia wished to be sole ruler, and, for a time, undertook to manage everything as if she were.⁵⁹ Suetonius wrote that Tiberius disliked her ambitions and avoided frequent meetings or long private talks with her. He was said to have occasionally sought and heeded her advice, but did not like this to be known. He thought public interference in politics unbecoming for a woman and, eventually, allowed her to direct only matters at home.⁶⁰ Livia, however, continued to attempt to exert her authority. Suetonius told an anecdote in which Livia was said to have urged Tiberius repeatedly to enrol in the juror's list the name of a man who had been granted citizenship. Tiberius agreed to do so on one condition – that the entry should be marked 'forced upon the emperor by his mother' (*albo extortum id sibi a matre*).⁶¹ Livia was said to have been furious and displayed old letters of Augustus' which showed that he mistrusted Tiberius' stubborn character, thereby emphasising her own role in Tiberius' rise to power. Her interference in political matters caused their relationship to deteriorate.⁶² Tacitus saw it as one of the reasons for Tiberius' retirement to Capreae. He wrote:

The statement is also made that he was driven into exile by the imperious temper of his mother, whose partnership in power he could not tolerate, while it was impossible to cut adrift one from whom he held that power in fee.⁶³

These words imply that, according to public opinion, Livia was owed a debt and could demand something in return. It is of note that Livia was at an extreme old age by this time – she would have been in her eighty-fifth year on Tiberius' retreat to Capreae. Her age was, however, not emphasised in the sources, which suggests that it was taken for granted that even a very elderly mother could expect to exert control over a son, who, by this time, would himself have been an old man. (Tiberius was aged 69 on his retirement to Capreae.) Indeed, her age would have augmented her authority. According to

Tacitus, Tiberius retained throughout his life a 'deep-rooted deference' for his mother. He appears to have been in awe of her, and Tacitus implies she was able to keep some of Tiberius' worse reputed character traits in check.⁶⁴ However, it must be noted that Livia, like Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, did not always get her own way.

Tiberius eventually quarrelled openly with his mother. He apparently did not even visit her when she became ill in the last years of her life, nor did he attend her funeral when she died aged 87. Tiberius was criticised for this lack of duty.⁶⁵ Social convention would have required a son to be dutiful to his aged mother, and Tiberius would have been expected to visit his mother in old age – especially when she was ill – in spite of their personal differences. Social custom required him to have given a funeral oration in honour of his mother. We learn from Plutarch that it was an ancient Roman tradition to pronounce public speeches at the funerals of elderly women, but that it was not the usual thing in the cases of young women. Caesar, for example, was said to have given a brilliant funeral oration for his aunt Julia, wife of Marius.⁶⁶ This underlines the special respect elderly women were entitled to.

The authority Roman mothers expected to exert went beyond their immediate family and extended to grandchildren and daughters-in-law. For instance, the strong-minded Livia, according to Suetonius, treated her grandson Claudius with scorn and was said to have refused to speak to him personally, writing him brief, bitter letters instead. Equally determined was Livia's friend Urgulania, who sent her grandson Plautius Silvanus a dagger as a hint to commit suicide when it was clear that he was guilty of the murder of his wife.⁶⁷ Aurelia, the mother of Julius Caesar, kept an eagle eye on the conduct of her daughter-in-law Pompeia, Sulla's granddaughter, and detected P. Clodius Pulcher when he infiltrated the exclusively female Bona Dea ceremony. Caesar proclaimed Pompeia's innocence, but nevertheless divorced her since his household had to be seen to be above suspicion. Even in mythology, examples of domineering mothers can be found. Venus, for instance, exercised her authority over her son Cupid and declared his marriage to Psyche, whose beauty was said to rival that of Venus, invalid.⁶⁸ Venus was overruled by Jupiter, however, who, in his role of *paterfamilias*, reversed her decision. Women may have had authority, but it could be overturned by the greater authority of the male.

So although mothers had no legal rights over their children, custom and social expectations made their role an authoritative one which did not stop once the children had reached adulthood. The virtue of *pietas* required sons and daughters of all ages to pay their mothers respect, which would have been reinforced by the mothers' age. The two case studies show that Rome was able to produce some feisty old women; they also show that, because a mother's control was not legally binding, an adult son could go his own way and that he could defy the wishes of even an aged mother. It is also of note that the prestige of these women was based on the status of their husband or

son. Less is known about how far an older adult daughter might defy her aged mother's wishes, but self-assertiveness was socially less acceptable in daughters than in sons. Dixon, in her study of Roman mothers, especially emphasises the expectation of a daughter's submissiveness to her mother's will.⁶⁹

Emotional and economic care of the aged

So far I have considered the authority that parents, even elderly ones, expected to exercise over their adult children through the legal construction of *patria potestas* (only for the father) and social convention expressed through the virtue of *pietas*. *Pietas* embraced family feeling, as well as duty. *Pietas* was seen as reciprocal natural affection, lying at the core of Roman family values. Parents were expected to maintain, protect and educate their children, while children were assumed to care for their parents in old age.⁷⁰ This applied to both emotional and economic care.

Among the wealthy elite, aged parents would not usually have been in need of material assistance from their children, but they would have looked for emotional and physical support in old age. Aged parents would rely on their children and grandchildren for protection, comfort, and for performance of burial rites. The lament that one would be without support in old age on the death of a child or grandchild was frequently found, both in the fictional literary texts and in representations of real life.⁷¹ A poignant illustration comes from Cicero, who, for rhetorical reasons, emphasised the pleasure an aged father hoped to get from an adult son in the last days of his life. Cicero, in a speech made on behalf of Caelius, invited his audience to feel pity for Caelius' old father, who would be deprived of his son's company if Caelius was found guilty:

I urge you to keep also before your eyes this unhappy old gentleman who is his father. Caelius is his only son and his support; on the future of Caelius depends all his peace of mind . . . Think of your own parents. Think of *your* children and how fond you are of them. Feel for him with the sympathy of sons or fathers and bring comfort to his grief. Heaven forbid that this venerable figure, already in the course of nature approaching the last days of his life, should desire death to come to him even more rapidly, because of a wound dealt him not by fate but by ourselves . . . Save the son for his father – and the father for the son. Do not let it be thought that you have treated with contempt an old man whose hopes are now almost ended.⁷²

Cicero was unashamedly melodramatic and overemotional in the defence of his client – playing on the old man's plight and age – but he clearly expected to strike a chord in the majority of his audience. The rhetoric worked and

Caelius was acquitted. A practical example of a son who did take the needs of his aged father into consideration can be found in Seneca. As mentioned in [Chapter 2](#), Seneca contemplated suicide after one of his bad catarrhal attacks, but the thought of his aged father made him change his mind. He wrote:

I often entertained the impulse of ending my life then and there; but the thought of my kind old father kept me back. For I reflected, not how bravely I had the power to die, but how little power he had to bear bravely the loss of me. And so I commanded myself to live . . .⁷³

A frail old father would look for physical support from his adult son; a son was expected, for example, to escort him to and from the senate. However, there is some indication that over time this type of duty was neglected. Valerius Maximus, first century AD, includes the practice among 'ancient customs' and Antoninus Pius, second century AD, was given a special mention for offering support to his father-in-law enabling him to attend the senate when he was weakened in old age.⁷⁴ In spite of some possible erosion of traditional manners, Roman ideology supported strong emphasis on the family unit, reinforcing the ideal that fathers and sons should be of mutual support to each other. An example can be found in Vergil's *Aeneid*. Aeneas is able to supply physical support to his aged father, helping him to escape from burning Troy. In turn, Aeneas relied on the experience of his aged father, Anchises, who was able to advise and guide his son through the first stages of his journey, and later through the Underworld.⁷⁵

Mothers – widows in particular – can be seen to have relied on their sons for support in old age.⁷⁶ Plutarch, for example, wrote: 'Mothers appear to have a greater love for their sons because of a feeling that their sons are able to help them . . .'⁷⁷ Seneca's wife Marcia, for instance, was said to have expressed a fear of being neglected in old age after the death of her adult son. She reputedly complained: 'There will be nobody to protect me, to shield me from contempt.'⁷⁸ Marcia still had daughters and grandchildren to comfort her in old age; her words therefore suggest that aged women looked not only for company from their adult sons, but also for status and protection.⁷⁹ This would have been particularly true for elderly widows, who would have used their adult sons in order to help them with their relations with the outside world. Seneca had a close relationship with his aged mother Helvia. He visited her regularly; they were said to enjoy each other's company and they undertook studies together.⁸⁰ Sons felt responsible for their ageing and widowed mothers. Pliny (*Ep.* 6.20.12) wrote that he refused to leave his ageing mother, fleeing from Vesuvius; we learn his mother thought he had a better chance of escape without her, as she was slow of movement because of age. Cornelia, in the letter discussed above, stated her expectations that her son Gaius should bring her comfort in old age, especially as he was the only son she had left. The often large age difference between husband and wife, as

was the case between Cornelia and her husband Tiberius, meant that wives were likely to outlive their husbands, making the relationship between mothers and sons more urgent.⁸¹ Large age differences also meant that mothers could be closer in age to their sons than to their husbands, with the possibility that mother and son could have more in common than husband and wife.

Grandmothers too, who in absence of a mother often stood in *loco parentis* for their grandchildren, were shown comfort and affection by their grandchildren, who continued to value their memory even after their death. We are told by Suetonius that Vespasian, who was brought up by his paternal grandmother Tertulla, treasured her memory and that he would often revisit the house in which he had been brought up, keeping it exactly as it always had been. In his *Parentalia*, a group of poems commemorating deceased relatives, Ausonius expressed his affection and duty for his grandmother Aemilia, who brought him up.⁸²

Less is known about the type of comfort given by daughters to parents in old age. This is probably because a daughter's support is likely to have been of a domestic nature and most of the sources were written by males who did not usually concern themselves with the particular duties and cares of the female world. One of the few father and daughter relationships we know about is that between Cicero and his daughter Tullia. Cicero and Tullia's relationship was close. Cicero wrote: 'it is our daughters that nature bids us make the great source of our happiness and object of our devotion'.⁸³ We learn from his private letters that Tullia visited her father regularly. Cicero enjoyed her company and praised her intelligent conversation.⁸⁴ He was devastated by her death in childbirth and for a time withdrew from Roman society (he was then in his early sixties) and even planned to build a shrine in her honour. He wrote that Tullia was all that made life worth living (*Att.* 12.23, 12.28). At the death of his daughter, Cicero's letters show genuine grief and pain quite different from the more public consolations and sentiments shown, for example, in the letter of condolence written to Cicero by the consul Servius Rufus (*Fam.* 4.5), or the sentiments from funeral tombs. Cicero's close relationship with his daughter may have been seen as unusual, as is implied by slander from his political enemies.⁸⁵ Unfortunately we have few private letters at our disposal. Publicly, the Romans preferred to concentrate on the exceptional, such as the piety shown to her father by the Vestal Virgin Claudia, who was said to have rescued her father at his triumph when he was about to be assaulted by a violent tribune of the plebs.⁸⁶ Emphasis was usually on the dramatic; however, this does not necessarily mean that everyday attentions from daughters to aged fathers were lacking.

There are also few concrete illustrations of close relationships between aged mothers and adult daughters.⁸⁷ Pliny has the example of the loving relationship of Arria minor and her daughter Fannia. These two ageing women were said to have lovingly supported each other throughout much

adversity, including persecution and an exile. Fannia also looked after her relation, the Vestal Virgin Junia, when she suffered from a lung disease.⁸⁸ Another example is Pliny's wife Calpurnia's consideration for her aged aunt Calpurnia Hispulla – who had been like a mother to her – on the death of her aunt's father, Calpurnia's grandfather. Calpurnia travelled from Bithynia, where Pliny was on governmental duty, by imperial messenger service, as Pliny felt sure that Trajan would have approved of a journey made for compassionate reasons.⁸⁹

The sources suggest a close relationship between mothers and daughters. Mothers were involved in the choice of their daughters' marriage partners, they were concerned with their grandchildren's education and upbringing, and may have lived in close proximity to their daughters.⁹⁰ Hallett, for example, proposes that mothers and daughters were more like sisters.⁹¹ I therefore think it reasonable to assume that daughters would have been supportive of their mothers in old age, even if the sources are, on the whole, silent on this subject.⁹² Once again, the dramatic was emphasised. Valerius Maximus related an anecdote about a daughter who came to her mother's rescue when the mother, found guilty of a capital crime, was in prison awaiting death. She was visited by her daughter who offered her mother her full breasts to keep her from starving. Maximus wrote: 'This might be thought to be against nature, if to love (*diligere*) parents were not Nature's first law.' In admiration of the daughter's piety, the mother's sentence was remitted and, according to legend, a temple to the personification of Pietas was built on the site of the prison after the woman's release.⁹³

The Romans also relied on their children for their funeral arrangements. A son would be responsible for his parents' burial and he was expected to perform the funeral rites and give a eulogy. At Rome, this was important – to fathers especially. At the funeral, the son would praise the deeds of the dead man and his ancestors before him. The commemoration of ancestors was symbolised by the carrying of the portraits of the ancestors (*imagines*) in the funeral parade, as mentioned in [Chapter 1](#). These parades were meant to inspire the young. A male heir was not only essential for the transmission of property and the perpetuation of the family name, but was also expected to continue the achievements of the deceased and those of the male family members who had died before him. Funerals were a means for placing the family within wider society. Great emphasis was placed upon the long-term continuity of the family, and the son to replaced the father in society.⁹⁴ Augustus, in a speech encouraging marriage, reputedly said:

Is it anything but the greatest blessing to leave behind as a successor when we leave this life, an heir both to our family and to our property; one who is our own, born of our own essence, so that only the mortal part of us passes away, while we live on in the child who

succeeds us, so that we will not fall into the hands of strangers and suffer an extinction as total as in warfare.⁹⁵

It is therefore no surprise that anxiety was expressed by fathers and grandfathers if they had no sons or grandsons to be their heirs. Catullus described an old man's delight in the birth of his only daughter's late-born son, this giving him an heir. Pliny wrote to his wife Calpurnia's grandfather on the event of her miscarriage (and therefore the loss of a prospective great-grandchild): 'you must inevitably feel it hard for your old age to be robbed of a descendant already on the way'.⁹⁶ It is evident that many parents and grandparents found it a comfort to know that they could depend, physically and emotionally, on their adult children or grandchildren in old age, and that adult offspring, males in particular, were seen as a great blessing. It is important to note, however, that *pietas* was a reciprocal duty, and that many parents continued to take emotional care of their adult children when they were in need of it. Consider, for example, Scribonia, who hurried to the aid of her daughter Julia (then aged 37), who was exiled to the island of Pandateria, even when she had had little contact with her daughter since her divorce from Augustus.⁹⁷

Rome's wealthy elite would normally have had no need for economic support in old age. But how did the less well off manage to clothe, feed and house themselves when they were old? Could they rely on any assistance? In most western contemporary societies old age has legal status and everybody can look forward to some form of retirement benefit. This can take the form of state pensions, made on the basis of contributions from both claimants and their employers, and occupational or personal pensions. In today's society, care for the aged is seen as a major issue, as more and more people live longer and longer and so the state is finding it increasingly difficult to afford pensions, medical and other care, and people are advised to provide for old age themselves. Today, financial insecurity in old age is a major problem, as private pensions do not benefit everybody and state pensions alone are too low to allay insecurity. Children are, in most cases, not expected to give financial support to their aged parents. Research carried out in California in the 1980s showed that to be reliant on one's adult children is cause for family tension and is resented as much by the old themselves as by their children. A 75-year-old remarked: 'aged parents should not have to live their remaining lives facing the heartbreaking experience of being such a burden to their children'.⁹⁸

At Rome – with the exception of grants or farms for veteran soldiers – there is no evidence of any state pensions and scant evidence of welfare payment for the elderly.⁹⁹ The less well-off could rely on burial clubs (*collegia funeraticia*) for their funeral arrangements. The *collegia* were clubs associated with trades and professions, or with districts (*vici*), and had a religious base. Members – slaves, freedmen, and poor freeborn – paid subscriptions. These

could be supplemented by gifts from wealthy benefactors. Food and money were distributed, but the object of the clubs was not primarily philanthropic and was not exclusively aimed at the old.¹⁰⁰ Support of the aged depended mainly on the family, and in the first instance on their children. Support for parents fell under the auspices of *pietas*. Cicero wrote: 'to refuse to maintain one's parents is wicked'.¹⁰¹ Until the second century AD there was no law at Rome (as there was in Athens) that legally obliged children to look after their aged parents. An undated rescript from Antoninus Pius (second century AD) stated only that 'it is right for children to look after the needs of their parents'.¹⁰² The earliest example that the obligations of *pietas* were legally recognised came from a rescript of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus in AD 161, ordering a father to be supported by a son, if the latter had the means to do so (*Cod. Iust.* 5.25.2). A consular judge could be approached to impose maintenance for a father on an unwilling child and vice versa. It is of note that daughters as well as sons were expected to look after aged parents. From the *Codex Iustianus* 8.46.5 (AD 287): 'Your daughter should offer you not only respect but also a livelihood, and the provincial governor will enforce this if required.'

Support was not automatic. Ulpian recorded that each legal case depended on its own merit and was dependent on need. It is of note that children were expected only to provide the basic necessities, such as food and shelter, and that they were expected to support their parents (and fathers their children) only if they had the means to do so.¹⁰³ Emancipated children too were obliged to support their needy parents and, in turn, had the right of maintenance by their fathers if they were impoverished (at least, from the late Republic onwards).¹⁰⁴ Children could be forced to support their parents, but no penalty existed, as was pointed out by Gardner.¹⁰⁵ It was taken for granted that family feeling and affection (*pietas* and *obsequium*) made parents and children support each other. Looking after one's aged parents was generally seen as a moral, or natural, duty (*Dig.* 25.3.5.13) without the need for enforcement by law.

Legal evidence from imperial rescripts, which was seemingly provided in answer to particular maintenance inquiries, indicated that voluntary support for aged parents worked reasonably well and that it was only occasionally that faithfulness to natural ties failed so that maintenance needed to be enforced. Besides, the majority of queries on maintenance concentrated on which class of descendants one was obliged to support, and not on immediate parent–children relationships. Support was expected in the first instance for fathers and other relatives in the paternal line, but *pietas* also required support for mothers and relatives on the mother's side (*Dig.* 25.3.5.2–4). If a child did not have the means to support the parent, the responsibility for support would go to other blood relatives or to one's freedmen.¹⁰⁶ It is notable that the legal sources make no mention anywhere of old age, only of need or, occasionally, of infirmity.¹⁰⁷ Support was therefore not given just because one

was old or had reached a certain age, as is common in most modern western societies – if an old man could look after himself, he was required to do so. That support from children or grandchildren was the aged's only refuge is underlined by evidence from funerary dedications. Tombstone inscriptions for young children express grief at the death because of the loss of potential support in old age. An example is an inscription to the two-year old Flavius Hermes which read: 'who preferred to abandon the light [of day] rather than to pay his due to his relations. Mocked of his grandmother, for he used to say he would look after her and be her support in her extreme old age.' It appears that parents, or grandparents, felt cheated of something they had a right to.¹⁰⁸

As mentioned above, modern research has shown that the old resent being a financial burden on their children. There is little evidence of this shown in the ancient texts. This may be partly because most of our evidence comes from the wealthy upper classes who were usually unlikely to have needed their children's material support. But social customs also played a major part. As in many traditional societies the Romans saw reciprocal welfare as a moral duty, and among non-property-owning classes support from children would have been the norm. Besides, as there is no evidence of alternative support arrangements for the elderly, it would not be natural for children simply to let their parents starve. Children were therefore seen as security for old age. The better-off members of the lower classes could prepare for financial support from their children in old age by ensuring that they learned a trade, as was pointed out by Bradley.¹⁰⁹

The sources do not make it clear what would happen to the aged poor who had no children, other blood relatives or friends to support them. Poverty generally did not concern the wealthy upper classes and the aged poor themselves were voiceless. Some old people may have been reduced to begging. The Romans did not approve of begging by able-bodied people who could earn their own living, but the disabled and the enfeebled old evoked pity. An edict, under the heading *De mendicantibus non invalides* (AD 382), stated that all beggars were to be tested for soundness of body and vigour of years. Those beggars who had no signs of any physical disability, and who were found to be lazy, were to become the slaves of those who reported them and were taken off the streets.¹¹⁰ No reference is made to age, only to physical incapacity; old age itself did not entitle a person to special privileges. It is of note that in nineteenth-century England, too, it was physical disability rather than age that qualified a person for transfer payments from the community. As in Rome, fit and able elderly members of society were expected to work and support themselves.¹¹¹

So were there no other solutions at Rome for those who were old and impoverished? As mentioned above, members of a *collegia* would probably have received some support and there is some reference to monies left for the maintenance of people of 'infirm age', similar to the schemes for the

maintenance of boys and girls, as we know from the jurist Paul; but no further details of these, or similar schemes, are known.¹¹² The old would also have benefited from the more generally distributed euergetism (the socio-political phenomenon of voluntary gift-giving). The state contributed corn dole, which was distributed to everyone who qualified, rich or poor, young (usually those aged over 11) or old. The corn dole was, however, not completely free and was not sufficient for needs. It is of note that such schemes were a political, rather than a social, measure. Euergetism gave honour to the donor, and there is no evidence of altruistic charity, as we know it, for the poor or the infirm. Hands argued that at Rome donations went to those who were 'worth it'; that is, not to the real poor, but to those who had similar qualities of mind or character, such as those who had lost what they had previously owned, or the middle classes.¹¹³ Some Romans looked after their personal aged slaves. Pliny, for example, wrote that he bought a farm for his old nurse. Some old slaves were given physically undemanding, but low status, jobs, such as child-minding or door-keeping.¹¹⁴

Among the Christians, there is some evidence of almsgiving to aged servants, orphans and the shipwrecked, as can be learned from Tertullian (third century AD). The wording suggests that this was a general fund, but Hands argues convincingly that among Christian communities, too, charity went mainly to those who were thought to be worthy of help. The giving was stimulated by the honour conferred on the donor, rather than by the need of the recipients.¹¹⁵ St Augustine remarked that children offered some protection in one's old age, which implies that among the early Christians too the elderly depended mainly on their children for support.¹¹⁶ It was not until the fifth century AD that homes for the aged, poorhouses, orphanages and hospitals were mentioned in the legal sources.¹¹⁷

Some of the aged poor, without any children, other relatives or rich friends to support them must therefore have lived in dire circumstances. The wealthy did not concern themselves with the plight of the impoverished older members of society, but they were well aware that the combination of poverty and old age made for grim reality. Juncus, who wrote a treatise on old age in the second century AD – of which only fragments remain – noted the complete lack of care for the aged poor. We are told that the old had inadequate food, shelter and clothing, and that some even have lacked water because they had no one to draw it for them.¹¹⁸ Even Cicero, who in his *De Senectute* mostly idealised old age, has Cato admit that old age was easier to bear if one was wealthy.¹¹⁹ In the fictional literary texts, Vergil, in the Underworld, accompanied Old Age by Disease, Fear, Hunger and Poverty. Some saw death as the best way out, as can be seen from an epigram:

Worn by age and poverty, no one stretching out his hand to relieve
my misery, on my tottering legs I went slowly to my grave, scarce
able to reach the end of my wretched life. In my case the law of death

was reversed, for I did not die first to be then buried, but I died after my burial.¹²⁰

This fictional satirical observation highlights the plight of the aged poor and emphasises the importance of children as a security for old age. As ancient Rome was a young society (the aged accounted only for around 7 per cent of the total population compared to today's figure of 18 per cent), there was a good chance that if you reached old age there were children or grandchildren to look after you.¹²¹ For those without adult children the need for a nest-egg would have been especially urgent.

It can be established that ancient Roman society placed much emphasis on the family unit. Cicero, for example, thought that family feeling was the basis of all virtues.¹²² It was ingrained in Roman ideology that parents and children would give each other mutual support. Grandparents and other blood relations were also incorporated in the familial framework of *pietas*, but naturally the parent/child relationship was seen as the closest.¹²³ Parents felt they had a life-long moral responsibility for their children, but in the final stages of life dependency shifted and parents relied practically, emotionally, and for the less well-off also economically, on their children. It is clear that children – of both sexes – were valued and were considered to be a comfort to aged parents. Those who did not have children adopted them, or bought themselves company and support by the promise of a legacy for those who looked after them. The plight of the childless emphasises the importance of adult children in the lives of the old. Those whose children died before them expressed the fear of being neglected and lonely in old age. For the aged and childless poor the situation was particularly dire, as there appears to be little other support in the way of charitable public assistance or welfare. The family was therefore an important unit in Roman society with both *patria potestas* and *pietas* standing at the centre of Roman familial values.

CONCLUSION

We all age. The process impacts on every aspect of our lives. Ageing is a vast and complex topic even when it is focused on a specific geographical location (Rome) and a specific period of time (from the Republic until late antiquity and beyond). Therefore I have tightened the focus by concentrating on the elemental expressions of ageing, the physical, intellectual and emotional, as the basic structure of this book. There is a further imposed focus since it is the Roman upper classes, and mainly men, about whom we have hard evidence of the ageing process. I have used scientific writings to identify the physical and medical aspects of ageing; moralistic and philosophical writings are used to depict the aspirational values; fictional writings – such as poetry, satire, drama, comedy, epigrams – are used to identify what the Romans considered to be repulsive and undesirable about ageing. In addition, I have attempted to identify and depict ‘real life’ experiences of ageing through the investigation of public and private letters, historical writings and anecdotes, legal texts, tombstone inscriptions and visual imagery.

The physical, intellectual and emotional aspects of ageing have provided a constructive structure of investigation. It is a structure that encourages comparisons and analyses with other eras, especially our own, in which we are aware of ageing as a demographic time bomb that will have an impact on our physical and economic challenges, on our emotional and social developments, and our intellectual and cultural responses.

Physical aspects

Physical change is the most obvious expression of ageing. Physical deterioration has an effect on all aspects of private and social life and is biologically inevitable. All old people suffer from some form of physiological deterioration caused by ageing. Ancient Greek and Roman medical and scientific writers understood ageing as a cooling and drying process – an imbalance of the humoral system – and old age was therefore often seen as a disease. To treat old age as a disease would have had clear repercussions on the status of the old at Rome. Old people who remained in good physical health were still

able to contribute to society and therefore had social standing. Physically feeble old people were no longer seen as useful and were regarded as a burden. The unavoidable physical frailty of old age could therefore be an enormous social handicap. In the fictional literary sources especially, old people were often portrayed as slow and decrepit and were derided for it. The young in particular were depicted as finding the slowness of old age irritating.

This may be among the reasons why many of the well-educated upper classes can be seen to have made special efforts to remain fit and healthy. In a variety of texts, old people were told to fight old age, knowing that a decrepit old age would not be easy to bear, on a personal as well as on a social level. It was thought that following a regimen of health, which involved leading a simple but active lifestyle, could delay the symptoms of ageing and make life in old age more comfortable. Emphasis on physical fitness can be identified throughout Roman antiquity, but it also had peaks and troughs generated by the influence of current intellectual thought. During the age of the Second Sophistic, for example, the great emphasis on the cultivation of the 'self' observed among the competitive face-to-face society of the Roman intellectual elite led to a pronounced preoccupation with bodily matters. For some old men this resulted in a tendency to hypochondria and a delight in complaining about the physical deterioration of old age. Other old men, who cared about the social impact they made, paid special attention to self-presentation because it was believed that a strong and dignified posture revealed good character, composure and self-control. They attempted to conceal some of the physical symptoms of old age, such as bad posture or a limping gait. The old may have tried to control their aged bodies, but they often left themselves open to ridicule.

Appearance – the way a Roman looked, walked and behaved – had moral significance. A Roman elder always had to be seen to behave with dignity in order to set an example to the young. This mattered in many aspects of life, from the way the old man dressed, his manner of speech and the way he behaved, especially in public. Any type of excess was frowned upon. Only those old people who behaved according to the shared, culturally defined norms of behaviour could expect the reverence which was traditionally attributed to old age. The outward appearance of age – such as wrinkles and grey hair – was used as a metaphor for age in association with 'right' behaviour. Wrinkles and grey hair were suggestive of years of experience, hard work and strength of character and were seen as a symbol of authority. Evidence from a variety of sources – including visual imagery, moralistic texts, and representations from real life – shows that many old people felt comfortable with the appearance of age, within a framework of behaviour that met the accepted standards of the time.

However, the opposite was also true. In the more popular fictional literary sources especially, wrinkles were seen as ugly – even repellent – and the appearance of the old was ridiculed, particularly if it was accompanied by

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undignified behaviour which was not socially acceptable in old age. Ancient evidence therefore reveals ambiguities, underlining the need to judge societal attitudes through a wide variety of source materials to account for a range of viewpoints. On the whole, however, I found less evidence of an adverse reaction to the physical appearance of age than in many other societies – for example, ancient Greece and our own contemporary western society, where great store is placed on the value of youthful beauty.

Geriatric infirmities are universally feared. Ancient Rome was no exception. It can be seen that the way the old experienced the ailments of age was influenced not only by the extremity of physiological decline, individual personality, outlook on life and mental strength, but also on social and intellectual environment. Complaints about physical infirmities may have been more concentrated and widespread during particular periods of time, but, over the ages, I exposed – from private and public letters and fictional material – that many old men found the infirmities of age difficult to cope with. Moaning about physical infirmities and other grievances about old age appears to have been a popular pastime of many old Romans. As an advanced stage of physical decrepitude denoted a loss of human dignity, some old men, especially those of the Stoic persuasion, attempted to avoid this by voluntary death, so that they could die with dignity.

Mental and intellectual aspects

I have treated the physical and intellectual dimensions of ageing as discrete topics. However, it is clear that the ancient Romans were aware that these aspects are closely related. Body and mind interact and interrelate, and my research emphasised the importance of both physical and mental fitness in old age as a basis for satisfactory life. This was realised by society in general and especially by the elderly themselves, who particularly feared the possibility of an impairment of the mind. Some form of physical decline was known to be unavoidable, but there was no consensus on the inevitability of an intellectual decline. Some scientific and moralistic texts believed in an inevitable deterioration of the mind in ageing, the only disagreement being on when decline would set in, while others did not necessarily see a diminishing of the intellect as part of the ageing process.

Mental and intellectual decline had practical implications, affecting an old man's role in life and consequently his status and self-esteem. Those who did not believe in an unavoidable decline had high expectations of the old. Indeed, there was a view that an old man's duty was to be useful to society. It was traditionally thought that experience could bring wisdom in old age, but it was stressed that wisdom did not come automatically and had to be worked at by special effort through correct behaviour and philosophical studies. Teaching and advisory responsibilities were seen as especially suited to old age, as these functions made use of an old man's experience and were

physically not too demanding. Many practical examples exist of old men who still had advisory – and at times also executive – positions in public life. The law, too, demanded the old to contribute to society and some civic obligations had to be fulfilled for the duration of one's life. Only a few exceptions were made, usually only for those aged 70 or over, and only for those duties requiring physical effort. Very few exceptions were made for duties which required mental application, suggesting that in general society expected old people to remain active mentally beyond the inevitable decline of their physical abilities.

As duty and employment were important in Roman society, even for those in old age, retirement was a moot point. As there was no official retirement age, the age at which one could retire with grace was uncertain. Those who withdrew early from public life – at a stage when, it was thought, they could still make a valuable contribution – were accused of idleness. This was a cause of anxiety for some old men and they were faced with a dilemma – at what point was it acceptable to withdraw from public life? The emphasis on duty and usefulness also expressed itself in an antipathy against learning in old age. There is clear evidence that there was a prevalent view that those in the first stages of old age – that is, generally, those in their early to late sixties – should still make use of their expertise and instruct, rather than be instructed. Study was generally recommended in old age, however, as long as it was done privately until the time came when an old man could legitimately withdraw from public life. Retirement was likely to have been accepted socially from the late sixties onwards, but was dependent principally on the old man's physical and mental fitness rather than on chronological age.

It was recognised that mental health was not completely under one's own control (many believed that the coldness of old age was detrimental to the activities of the mind), but many educated Romans believed intellectual and mental deterioration could be kept at bay by keeping the mind active. The same applied to decline of memory in ageing, which was a serious handicap in a society with a strong emphasis on the spoken word. It was believed that an inactive mind would decline easily and many an ageing man made special, conscious, efforts to avoid this by reading, writing, having serious conversations with friends, the study of philosophy and the practice of special mnemonic exercises. Today, the 'use it or lose it' theory is of particular interest to many gerontologists whose aim it is to improve the quality of older people's lives.

At Rome, character traits were believed to change over the course of life. Mental characteristics were commonly thought to be based on a combination of the physiological stages of life (which differentiated the young from the old) and social and environmental circumstances. Many of the character traits assigned to the old are therefore seen as unpleasant – firstly, because in old age the body deteriorated and it was thought the old had little physical and mental strength left; secondly, because of what can be called 'the vagaries of

life' (in that many old people thought life treated them badly and complained of neglect and being slighted). This explains a stereotypically negative image of the characteristics of old age. The old were seen as cantankerous, always complaining and talking about the good old days, refusing to move with the times. They were also seen as cowardly and avaricious. This is a collective, societal, portrait of a stereotypical old man, but undoubtedly these images had some semblance to the behaviour of real old men. It is of interest that, from accumulated interviews, contemporary research reveals an almost identical stereotypical image of the old. As in antiquity, this image is based on feeble physical and mental qualities.

Emotional aspects

My investigations have highlighted how old people at Rome were expected to behave according to culturally defined norms. The old should always be seen to be self-controlled and should, at all times, act with moderation and with dignity. These symbols and expectations, of how an old person ought to behave, were particularly strong when sexuality was under scrutiny. From scientific and moralistic texts we learn that it was thought that sexual passions declined, even disappeared, in old age due to physiological causes (the chilliness and dryness of an old person's body). From a moral viewpoint, too, it was believed that sex and old age were incompatible. Sexual passions were only for the young; in the old they were viewed with repugnance. Examples can be found in a wide variety of sources, from the literary to representations of real life. This view was especially prevalent among the moralists who believed sexuality blinkered the mind and was a hindrance to the attainment of wisdom. Only in old age, therefore, could a man fully develop his mind without physical and emotional distractions.

It can be established from an examination of legal sources, moralistic texts and representations of real life, that sexual relations within a marriage in old age were seen as inappropriate, as marriage was commonly accepted to be for the creation of legitimate children, which was no longer possible in old age. Therefore, an old man who still had sexual desires had to look elsewhere. While married, he could consider an extra-marital affair (but only with a certain class of woman), or after divorce or the death of his wife he could remarry a younger woman with whom procreation would still have been viable. I suggest that, although old men who still had sexual stirrings were told in theory to overcome these feelings, in practice, sexual affairs of old men with a concubine or mistress were overlooked as long as they were conducted privately and without scandal. However, the idea of a passionate, sexual relationship between an old man and a young girl was seen as distasteful, even within the context of a marriage, and an old man in love with a young girl was ridiculed and seen as a fool.

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For ageing widows or divorcees remarriage was not seen as socially acceptable. A double standard in attitude to sexuality in men and women did not permit women to look for sexual satisfaction outside marriage. For women, therefore, the menopause was likely to have been the demarcation of all sexual activities. Upper-class Romans were uneasy about the sexuality of women – that is, women from their own class, such as mothers, wives, sisters, and so on. The subject is therefore characterised by silence, but a whole body of invective can be found against the sexuality of fictional old women in literary writings. These characters, depicted as courtesans, prostitutes, actresses or bawds, were often attacked in particularly abusive and scurrilous language. Sexual misdemeanour was not tolerated in the old, even for such marginal figures as prostitutes, who, when they were old and no longer deemed attractive, were expected to retire gracefully. How the old prostitute should live was not usually considered. The prejudice against sex in old age at Rome was a cultural condition that lasted over centuries and is still found in many contemporary societies across the world.

The emphasis on duty was also strong within family and kinship relations. Rome was a patriarchal society and only the *paterfamilias*, usually the father, had extensive legal authority (*patria potestas*) over his children. This included control over all property and lasted as long as he lived. This meant that, theoretically, elderly fathers had substantial powers through which they could impose commands and enforce obedience on their adult children. I have shown how, in practice, these powers were mitigated by family affection and social mores; the law also gradually modified some of the more radical aspects of the father's powers. The mother could wield authority under the auspices of the virtue of *pietas* and through her age, which demanded respect (as was demonstrated by the case studies of Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, and Livia), but as she had no legal authority her wishes could ultimately be overruled.

The virtue of *pietas* consisted of a life-long and reciprocal obligation and affection between parents and children and stood at the core of Roman family relationships. It was seen as natural that parents had a moral duty to care for their children and that children would look after their parents – emotionally and economically – when their parents were old and feeble. Parents would rely on their adult children for companionship and practical help, including burials. Older widows especially, who, as mentioned above, were not expected to remarry, relied on their adult sons for company, status and contact with the outside world. There is little evidence of state pensions or altruistic welfare payments for the old. It appears that if the old were in need of economic assistance this duty fell, in the first instance, on their children. Social customs required children to provide for aged parents, but economic support was not automatic; it depended on need and the children's ability to provide help. This reciprocical interdependence between parents and adult

children highlights the importance of the family as a unit, and both the legal institution of *patria potestas* and the virtue of *pietas* were regarded as the foundation stones on which Roman society was built.

My study of Roman society's attitudes to old age and how the aged themselves felt about growing old emphasises the complexity of the ageing process, which is reflected in its biological, personal, cultural and intellectual dimensions. My investigations have highlighted the role the old were expected to play in society, which involved a need to conform to certain cultural and behavioural norms and expectations. The old were expected to be self-controlled, responsible citizens, with a great sense of duty to society in general, to their families and to the younger generation. Older people themselves felt that they had a particular role to play and acted in a way that was expected of them. This trend appears still to be true today. Comfort's contemporary study on old age indicates that a high proportion of the mental and attitudinal changes seen in old people are not the biological effects of ageing, but are the result of role-playing.¹ It is difficult to establish for certain to what extent old people at Rome lived up to societal expectations, but it was believed that the changes in behaviour from youth to old age was a natural occurrence that would happen gradually. I would argue that practice contributes to the foundations of such ideals and that the majority of old people seem to have complied with societal rules. Those who did not were criticised and ridiculed and it was therefore in the old's own interest to conform.

A final question

A major question remains: Was ancient Rome, on the whole, a good place to be old? It was almost certainly not good for all old people. The weak and the decrepit, for example, were considered to be a burden; they were often marginalised and viewed with contempt. With no pension benefits and little other provisions for the poor, old age for people without social position or resources is likely to have been extremely difficult, dependent as they were on their children, other relatives or friends. There was, however, a positive side to Roman society's attitudes to old age. Old age did not automatically marginalise an individual. An old person could have status, authority and reverence, as long as societal expectations about how life should be lived were fulfilled. Respect for old age had to be earned. Whether or not an old man was able to fulfil his role in society depended largely on his social status, his own personal qualities and his physical and mental fitness. Modern research findings show that many of today's elderly feel that their expertise is often ignored, and that the young believe the old can teach them nothing. In contrast, the experience of old age was valued in Roman society, and admiration was also shown to those who were no longer physically fit but whose status was assured by their previous deeds and actions. The elderly *matrona*,

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too, was esteemed because of her continuing role as a mother or grandmother.

Discrimination against old people in the workforce – which is seen to be a concern in contemporary society – was not a particular problem in Rome. An old man was not automatically written off because of his age, and a fit and able old man could still have status and have a part to play in the organisation of society. There is, in fact, little feeling among the old at Rome of disengagement, in contrast to what is perceived to be a problem today. Therefore in ancient Rome, depending on personal circumstances and qualities, old age could be a positive experience. In the words of two old Romans themselves, old age could ‘not only not be burdensome, but even happy’ and ‘a time of bloom’.²

NOTES

PREFACE

- 1 For example, Richardson [1933] 1969 (on ancient Greece); de Beauvoir 1972; Kirk 1971 (on ancient Greece); Stearns 1977; Holmes 1983; Minois 1989 (from antiquity to the Renaissance); Laslett 1989, 1994; Kertzer and Laslett 1995; Troyansky 1989 (eighteenth-century France); Pelling and Smith 1991; Shahar 1997 (on medieval times); Johnson and Thane 1998 (from antiquity to modern period); Thane 2000 (England).
- 2 For example, Rawson 1986, 1991, 1997 (with Weaver); Dixon 1988, 1992; Bradley 1991; Kertzer and Saller 1991.
- 3 Parkin 1992a. In literature, e.g. Coleman-Norton 1947; Chandler 1948; Couch 1959 and Powell 1988 (on Cicero's *De Senectute*); Cody 1976 (on the *senex amator* in Plautus); Bertman 1976, 1989; Maltby 1979; Kebric 1983 (ageing in Pliny's letters); Esler 1989 (on Horace's old women); Falkner and de Luce 1989 (a collection of essays on old age in Greek and Latin literature). Also Gnilka 1983 (centring on Christianity); Grmek 1958 and Suder 1991 (on medical aspects of ageing); Wiedemann 1996 (on aged slaves). See also Finley 1989 (a summary article). For an annotated select bibliography on old age in Graeco-Roman antiquity and early Christianity: Eyben 1989.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 The 'ages of life' could appear in poetry or in the scientific, medical and moralistic sources and will be considered further in [Chapters 3](#) and [4](#). On the Roman life-cycle, Boll 1913; Wackernagel 1962; Eyben 1973a; Suder 1978; Philibert 1984; see also Slusanski 1974 on age graduations.
- 2 Some examples: Ov. *Met.* 15.199–213 (*senex*, from the age of 60); Philo, first century AD, *De Opificio Mundi* 36.105 (old age from 56); Galen, second century AD *Definitiones Medicae* 104 (*senex*, from the age of 48); Ptolemy, second century AD, *Tetrabl.* 410.206–207 (56–68 (*senectus*), 68 onwards (*senium*)); Censorinus, third century AD (after Varro), *De Die Natali* 14.2 (*senex*, 60); Macrobius, fourth century AD, *Comm.* 1.6.71.77 (49–70); Augustine *De Div. Quaest.* 1.58.2 (60); Isidore of Seville, seventh century AD, 70 (*senectus*) in *Etym.* 11.2, and 50–77 (*senectus*), 70 (*senium*) in *Differentia* 2.74–77. In the juristic writings (*lex Pappia Poppaea*) the age of 60 was seen as the threshold of old age for men and 50 for women (these were the ages at which people were no longer expected to remarry), see *Dig.* (Ulpian) 16.3, *Cod. Iust.* 5.4.27. In the literary texts, the 'old' men of comedy were usually aged 60 or over: e.g. Plaut. *Merc.* 1015ff.; Ter. *Haut.* 62, *Ad.* 938ff.

- 3 Gellius NA 10.28 (quoting the historian Tubero).
- 4 See Chapter 1 for physical appearances, Chapter 2 for physical weaknesses, Chapter 4 for the mental characteristics of the old.
- 5 On age-rounding, Duncan-Jones 1977. On the Romans' imperfect knowledge of their own age, see, for example, the many texts on longevity, with often wildly inaccurate statements of age (Chapter 1, n. 21).
- 6 See esp. Parkin 1992b; cf. Hopkins 1966; Den Boer 1973; Frier 1982; Saller and Shaw 1984; Saller 1994; Kertzer and Laslett 1995; Scheidel 1999.
- 7 Coale and Demeny 1983. See also Parkin 1992b: 67–90; Saller 1994: 9–70.
- 8 Scheidel 1999: 255 n. 3
- 9 It must be pointed out that a higher level, Level 4 (with rates of life expectancy of 27.5) or Level 6 (with rates of life expectancy of 32.5 years) – is sometimes applied to the upper classes (see also Scheidel 1999: 255–266, who argued that there are no obvious reasons why the wealthy should live longer than the poor; cf. Finley 1989: 3, who points out that there will have been variations in living standards, but that both rich and poor suffered from similar incurable diseases and bodily deterioration).
- 10 Parkin 1992b: 83; Saller 1994: 10, 23.
- 11 Parkin 1992b: 134, 1997: 137 (today this is closer to 18 per cent). For the late nineteenth-century data, see Grmek 1958: 90; for the twentieth-century figures Thane 2000: 1.
- 12 Mullan, 2000: 10, argues that in today's society, life expectancy for old people has changed much less than life expectancy at birth.
- 13 Among the major surviving philosophical writings on old age, Plato *Rep.* I.328c ff.; Arist. *Rhet.* 1389a–1390b; Cic. *De Senectute*; several of Seneca's letters, e.g. *Ep.* 12, 26, 30, 58, 77; Musonius Rufus fr. 17; Plut. *An Seni Res Publica Gerenda Sit*. Among lost works, or fragments, work by Theophrastus and his pupil Demetrius of Phaleron; Aristo of Ceos (or Chios), a third century BC Peripatetic philosopher; Varro's Menippean satire (first century BC); Favorinus, second century AD; Juncus, c. second century AD?; Diogenes of Oenoanda (c. second century AD). For an overview, see Powell 1988: 24–30.
- 14 As my work is focused on the city of Rome, no attempt has been made to include any papyrological evidence.
- 15 This distinction is also used by Parkin 1992b (esp. p. 40), 1997, 1998.
- 16 On the latter, see Wiedemann 1996.
- 17 For example, Arist. *Rhet.* 2.12.1389b, *Parv. Nat.*
- 18 On the traditional respect for the old, esp. Gell. NA 2.15.1ff. Cicero set his dialogue in defence of old age, written in c. 44 BC, in 150 BC. The choosing of some time in the distant past begs the suggestion that he thought times were changing and that less respect was paid to the elderly in his own time. This complaint was also voiced by e.g. Val. Max. 6.2; Livy *pr.* and 34.4.1ff.; Pliny *Ep.* 8.14.4–6.
- 19 Grmek 1958: 4.
- 20 For an acceptable definition of culture (Kaufman 1986: 15): 'culture is the sum or aggregate customs, traditions and behaviours that are learned and shared among a group of people'.

1 APPEARANCES

- 1 Galen *Mixtures*, 2.619–621; Arist. *HA* 3.518a 1–23, *Gen. An.* 5.4.784b8, 5.4.784b9ff., 5.4.784a30–785a5, *Prob.* 17.26; cf. Macrobius *Sat.* 7.10.
- 2 Galen *Mixtures* 2.621; cf. Arist. *Gen. An.* esp. 5.3.783b30ff. (baldness is caused

- by hardening and thickening of the skin on the head due to lack of heat and drying up).
- 3 Galen *Mixtures* 2.581–582; cf. *De Sanitate Tuenda* 5.1.2; Sen. *Ep.* 121.15–17. On the human constitution as cold and dry, or cold and moist, in old age, see also [Chapter 2](#).
 - 4 This chapter will almost entirely deal with men. The outward appearance of women often had sexual connotations and will be considered in [Chapter 7](#).
 - 5 On physiognomy, see also [Chapter 2](#).
 - 6 Pythagoras, in Hippolytus, *Refutatio Haeresium* 1.2; Porphyry. *Vita Pythag.* 13; Iamblichus *Vita Pythag.* 17; Hippocrates, in Galen IV, pp. 797–798 Kühn; Arist. *An. Pr.* 2.27.70b, *De An.* 2.9.421a, *Hist. An.* 1.1.488b, 1.9.491b, 1.15.494b, *Part. An.* 2.2.648a, 2.4.650b, 3.4.667a, *Gen. An.* 4.3.769b, 4.5.774a, 5.7.786b; ps. Arist. *Physiognomy*; Gell. *NA* 1.9.2. On physiognomy: Evans 1935: 43–84; Gleason 1990, 1995; Wardman 1967.
 - 7 On physiognomy and oratory: Cic. *De Or.* 3.21.6, *Or.* 55, 59–60, *Brut.* 29.110; Quint. *Inst.* 11.3.65ff.
 - 8 On Polemo's work and influence, Evans 1935: 49–51.
 - 9 Cic. *De Or.* 3.216.221ff., *Or.* 55, 59, 60; Sen. *Ep.* 113.22; cf. Arist. *An. Pr.* 2.27.70b7.
 - 10 Ps. Arist. *Physiogn.* 807b, cf. 808a (the low-spirited man has a wrinkled face). On the alleged pessimism of the old, see [Chapter 4](#).
 - 11 For example, Arist. *Rhet.* 2.13; Hor. *AP* 169–179, as discussed in [Chapter 4](#).
 - 12 Arist. *Gen. An.* 4.1.765b, 5.3.783b. For the association of abundant hair and masculinity, Musonius (first century AD Stoic) fr. 21; Clem. *Al. Paed.* 3.19.1–3. On this, Gleason 1990: 399–402. On masculinity, also [Chapter 6](#).
 - 13 Quint. *Inst.* 11.31.143; Dio 46.18.3.
 - 14 Ov. *Ars Am.* 3.161–162; cf. Plut. *Quaest. Conv.* 2.1.9 (*Mor.* 633c). Not all men, however, saw baldness as a disadvantage, as can be seen from many of the old-age portraits discussed in this chapter.
 - 15 On Caesar: Suet. *Caes.* 45, cf. Dio 43.43.1ff. Sen. *Brev. Vit.* 12.3.
 - 16 Suet. *Dom.* 18 (bald, with spindly legs and a paunch), *Cal.* 50.1 (bald and badly built); cf. Suet. *Galba* 21 (bald). See also Smith 1997: 196 for other examples.
 - 17 On the ill-proportioned body, esp. ps. Arist. *Physiogn.* 814a.
 - 18 Featherstone and Hepworth 1993: 304–332.
 - 19 For example, Plaut. *Asin.* 863, 934; *Cas.* 239ff., 266, 277, 554; *Merc.* 291, 305, 314, 575. The 'senex amator' will be further discussed in [Chapter 6](#).
 - 20 Juv. *Sat.* 10.191–198 (trans. P. Green); similarly Luc. *Dial. Mort.* 6.2.39–45. On the loss of physical beauty in old age, cf. Max. *El.* 1, esp. 17ff.
 - 21 Pliny *NH* 7.48.156–49.164; Val. Max. 8.13.1; Phlegon *Longaevi* (Müller *Fragm. Hist. Graec.* (Greeks only); Censorinus *De Die Natali* 15; Aug. *De Civ. Dei* 15.12; Lucian *Longaevi* (Greeks only). It is of note that many accounts show highly exaggerated ages. On the wish for longevity, also Cic. *Sen.* 16.69. In mythology, however, the wish for longevity presupposed eternal youth. On some occasions, the mention of eternal youth was omitted and the protagonist reached extreme old age and prayed for death (e.g. Tithonus in *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 218–238 and the Sibyl of Cumae, Ov. *Met.* 14.101–53).
 - 22 Cic. *De Or.* 2.239, cf. 2.236; Quintilian *Inst.* 6.3.7; cf. Arist. *Poetics* 5.1 (the ridiculous is a species of the ugly). On this subject, esp. Garland 1995: 76/77ff.; Richlin 1983: 70–80.
 - 23 Plut. *An Seni* 789e (people make fun of wrinkles and grey hair); J. Chrysost. *Ep. ad Hebr.* 28.15–16 ('wrinkles in old age do not have many earthly admirers, but wrinkles do not impair the beauty of the soul').

- 24 Tib. 1.42–46. On the dying of hair cf. Mart. 3.43, *Anth. Pal.* 11.398. On the plucking of hair, Propertius 3.25.16. On the wearing of wigs, Lucian *Alex.* 59 (by a 70-year-old).
- 25 Clem. Al. *Paed.* 3.3; trans. W. Wilson; cf. J. Chrysost. *Ep. ad Hebr.* 7.4, who saw the use of cosmetics by some old men as ‘a disgrace to the hoary head’. On excessive male grooming as a sign of effeminacy and loose living, Gleason 1995: 400ff.
- 26 Ov. *Met.* 7.287–293 (trans. A.P. Melville); cf. Ov. *Met.* 7.162–260. Many of the gods were seen to prefer youth and asked for rejuvenation of their earthly favourites, e.g. Homer *Od.* 7.257, 16.172–174; cf. n. 21.
- 27 An exception is the emphasis on youth in the portraits of the Julio-Claudians, which had political significance (see p. 23). On ageing in Greek society: Richardson [1933] 1969; Minois 1989: 43–76 (a chapter entitled ‘Sad Old Age’). It is of note that his Roman chapter was subtitled ‘The Old Man’s Grandeur and Decadence’).
- 28 On this, Giuliani 1986.
- 29 For example, Drerup 1980: 87–129; Gruen 1993; Smith 1993; Flower 1996.
- 30 Sallust *Jug.* 4.5; Pliny *NH* 35.6; Polyb. 36.6.
- 31 On the use of the ancestor masks as propaganda, Flower 1996. The custom was popular under the Republic, but may have declined in later years according to an incident related by Quintilian, *Inst.* 6.1.40.
- 32 Syrus (first century BC) *Sent.* 590W; cf. Ter. *Ad.* 414ff. (a son is advised by his old father that he should look into the ways of all men, as if living in a looking glass, and draw from others a model for himself); Horace *Sat.* 1.4.103–126, 1.6.65–99; [ps.] Plut. *De Liberis Educandis* 20.114 AB.
- 33 See Nodelman 1975: 31 on how to read a Roman portrait.
- 34 For example, Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 1.15.34, 3.2–3, *Rep.* 5.6–11; Scipio fr. 13 *ORF* (on Scipio’s advice to adhere to the *mos maiorum*).
- 35 Cic. *Sen.* 6.19; similarly cf. Plut. *An Seni* 789e (old men show good sense, prudent thought and conservatism).
- 36 *Anth. Pal.* (Philodemus) 5.112; Hor. *Epist.* 2.214.
- 37 Plut. *An Seni* 789e–f. On grey hair as a symbol for wisdom, e.g. Varro *Men.* fr. 5B; Ov. *Fast.* 5.57ff.; Val. Max. 2.1.10; Amm. Marc. 14.6.6 (white hairs carry authority); *Anth. Pal.* 11.25 (Apollonides, ‘Age of wisdom is beginning to hit our temples’); 11.41 (Philomedes, grey hair as a messenger of wisdom); Aug. *Discourse on Psalm* 91 (‘As the old man’s head is, so will our deeds be’). On the expectation of respect, Sen. *Her. Fur.* 1248–1249 (expectation of reverence from a son for the grey hair of his father); Leviticus 19.32 (‘Rise up before the hoary head’), J. Chrysost. *Ep. ad Hebr.* 4.11–13 (‘if a young man insults him [the old man] he immediately puts forward his grey hairs’). In some epigrams, fun was made of grey-haired old men who did not live up to expectations, e.g. *Anth. Pal.* 11.420 (an.), 11.430.
- 38 Cic. *Sen.* 18.62; *Anth. Pal.* 11. 419; Sen. *Brev. Vit.* 7.10. Compare also: Plaut. *Trin.* 367–368 (‘Tis not by age, but by Nature, that wisdom is acquired, age merely spices wisdom; wisdom is the nutrient of old age’); Publilius Syrus *Sent.* 590W.
- 39 On the portraiture of the *libertini*, e.g. Zanker 1975; Kleiner 1977, 1987; Kockel 1993.
- 40 Kleiner 1977: 142ff.; Kockel 1993: 18.
- 41 Kleiner 1977: 118–141.
- 42 Quint. *Inst.* 11.1.31.
- 43 Cic. *Tusc.* 5.16.47, cf. Sen. *Ep.* 114.2 (who also saw wantonness in speech as proof

- of public luxury); Quint. *Inst.* 11.1.30. See also Plut. *Ant.* 2.4, who drew a comparison between Antony's Asiatic style in rhetoric and his flamboyant way of life; Dion. of Hal. *De Antiquis Oratoribus*, *pr.*
- 44 On this, Kennedy 1972: 69ff.
- 45 Cic. *Brut.* 95.325–326. Quint. (*Inst.* 11.1.31) was later to repeat a remark by Cicero (*Brut.* 2.8) that his style was beginning to grow 'grey-haired'.
- 46 Tac. *Dial.* 18, on Cicero's rhetorical style. Cicero considered his own more mature work as briefer and less exuberant, and valued these speeches more highly, e.g. Cic. *Brut.* 2.8, comparing a speech from *Pro Rosc. Am.* 26.72 to *Pro Cluentio* 199.
- 47 Cic. *Brut.* 94.324.
- 48 Cic. *Sen.* 6.16, 11.37.
- 49 Quint. *Inst.* 11.1.31–32.
- 50 As pointed out by Hockey and James 1993: 11.
- 51 Laslett 1989: 14. In his catalogue of 'fears of old age', loss of beauty and attractiveness appeared as the sixth item, the first being 'fear of death'. On charges against old age in antiquity: e.g. Cic. *Sen.* and Juncus in Stobaeus' *Florilegia*, IV, 85; cf. Musonius fr. 17 (none of these included loss of physical attractiveness, but it is of note that these were mainly philosophical treatises).

2 OLD AGE: AN ANCIENT DISEASE?

- 1 Esp. Hipp. *On the Nature of Man* 1–7, *Regimen* 1.3; cf. *On Ancient Medicine*, esp. 16ff., *Airs, Waters, Places and Humours*.
- 2 This was accredited to Hippocrates in Galen's *De Elementis ex Hippocrate* I. Galen enlarged this theory in e.g. *De Sanitate Tuenda* 1.2.
- 3 On the history of the causes of ageing, Grmek 1958: 8–22. On the four humours, Kliblansky *et al.* 1964.
- 4 On old age as a cooling/drying process, Hipp. *Aph.* 1.14, *Nat. Hom.* 12.30–40. On old age as dry, cf. Arist. *Probl.* 875a, *Parv. Nat.* 466a; Gal. *Mixtures*, 2.582, 2.619; Macr. *Sat.* 7.10.7–10; Orib. *Lib. Inc.* 3.3 R. IV.77. Old age was seen also by some as cold and moist, Hipp. *Regimen* 1.33, *Salubr.* 2; Macr. *Sat.* 7.10.8. The doctrine of old age as cold/dry or cold/wet came from a combination of theory and observation. The dryness of old age could be observed from the outside, e.g. dryness of skin, Cels. *Med.* 1.9.3; Gal. *Mixtures* 2.581 and 2.619 (causing hair loss), *San. Tuenda* 5.1.2 (causing wrinkles); Macrobius *Sat.* 7.6.19. The wetness of old age could be observed through the various illnesses; it was thought that old age was dominated by phlegm.
- 5 Arist. *Gen. An.* 5.784b32–34; Sen. *Ep.* 108.28; cf. Verg. *Aen.* 6.275 ('Here dwell pallid Diseases and morose Old Age', quoted by Sen. *Ep.* 108.29); Ter. *Phorm.* 575, quoted by Schol. Iuven. 10.219; Schol. Pers. 2.41; Jer. *Psalm* 89. See also Otto 1962: 316.
- 6 Galen *San. Tuenda* 1.5, 5.4; cf. *Mixtures* 2.582.
- 7 Arist. *Juv. et Sen.*, esp. 5.469a–6.470b. On old age lacking in blood and therefore cold, cf. Galen *On the Body* 810.
- 8 Arist. *On Respiration* 17.479a; cf. Gal. *San. Tuenda* 5.4 ('the old slip into disease quite easily because of the condition of their body').
- 9 Gal. *San. Tuenda* 5.1.2 (trans. R.M. Green); cf. *Mixtures* 2.578.
- 10 See e.g. Grmek 1958: ch. 2.
- 11 Hipp. *Aph.* 3.31; Cels. *Med.* 2.1.17–22; Gal. *Mixtures* 2.582; Pliny *NH* 7.50.168; cf. Arist. *De An.* 408b20ff., 780a30ff., *Gen. An.* 745a32 (loss of teeth), 780a17ff., *Probl.* 958b32, 958b38; Diog. of Oen. fr. 144 Sm.=59 Ch. (coughing) and 145Sm.=57 Ch. (bad eyesight).

- 12 *Dig.* 21.1.11 (Paul).
- 13 *Gal. San. Tuenda* 5.8. Siegel, 1968: 236, noted that Galen did not consider the action of drugs as a direct pharmacological effect on an organ, as we do.
- 14 See esp. King, whose work *Hippocrates' Woman* (1998) only has four references to the menopause.
- 15 On women's inferior physical and mental condition, e.g. *Hipp. Reg.* 27; *Arist. Probl.* 4.25.879a33–34, 4.28.88a12–20; *Ter. Hec.* 310–312 (comparing the minds of women to those of children); *Plut. Praec. Conj.* 48.145e–f.
- 16 For example, *Hipp. Nat. Mul.* 1.1 and Dean-Jones 1994: 105.
- 17 On women as moist and wet: *Hipp. Reg.* 1.27, 1.34; *Arist. Probl.* 879a33–34, *Gen. An.* 728a19–22; Rufus of Ephesus, in *Oribasius Liber Incertus* 20.1–2, 13, 17 (see also Carson 1990: 137–143; Hanson 1990: 317–319). On women as hotter than men, e.g. *Hipp. Ep.* 1.13, *Reg.* 1.34. On women as colder, *Arist. On Length of Life* 5.466b.
- 18 *Hipp. Septim./Oct.* 9; *Arist. Parv. Nat. (Long.)* 5.466b. On the female as inferior specimen, therefore ageing faster, *Arist. Gen. An.* 775a14; cf. *Arist. Hist. An.* 582a21–24, 583b23–28. On this, Dean-Jones 1994: 103–105.
- 19 Dean-Jones 1994: 105.
- 20 *Arist. Hist. An.* 545b 26–31, *Pol.* 1335a9 (women 50, men 70); *Sor. Gyn.* 1.4.20 (women 50, exceptionally 60, in special circumstances 35). Under the Augustan marriage laws a man was not legally obliged to remarry after the age of 60, a woman after the age of 50. On the menopause, Amundsen and Diers 1970: 79–86. On a woman's function as child-bearer, see [Chapter 6](#).
- 21 Esp. Perkins 1992: 245–272; cf. Foucault 1986: 99ff.
- 22 Foucault 1986: 100.
- 23 *Plut. Tuenda San. Praec.*, 122d–e; *Gal. San. Tuenda* 5.1.
- 24 From an example: *Suet. Aug.* 75–77 (Augustus); *Sen. Ep.* 83.6 (himself); *Gal. San. Tuenda* (on Antiochus); *Pliny Ep.* 3.10 (Spurinna). An exception was Horace, *Sat.* 2.2.84–88, who argued that when one feels old and frail it would be permissible to indulge.
- 25 *Hipp. Reg.* 1ff.
- 26 *Cels. Med.* 2.18–33; and in Galen's *San. Tuenda*; *Plut. San. Tuenda Praec.*
- 27 *Gal. San. Tuenda* 5.3.1–2; cf. 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, *The Art of Medicine* 405–406.
- 28 *Gal. San. Tuenda*, 5, 4–9; cf. *Cels. Med.* 1.32 (the old should eat often).
- 29 For example, *Plato Laws* 2.666a–c; *Cic. Tusc. Dip.* 4.13.39; *Lucr. De Rer. Nat.* 3.465ff.; *Pliny NH* 14.578; *Cels. Med.* 1.3.33; *Gal. San. Tuenda* 5.6 (even specifying the types of wine suited to the aged), *On the Body* 810; *Jer. Ep.* 22.88.35; *John Chrysost.* 4th *Ep. ad Titus* 4.2–5; *Is. of Seville, Etymol.* 20.3.2.
- 30 *Gal. On the Body*, 809; *Plato Leg.* ii (666a–c); cf. *Hor. Od.* 3.21.11; *Anth. Pal.* 11.54, 11.55. On depression as a mental characteristic of old age, see [Chapter 4](#).
- 31 For example, *Luc. Sat.* 28; *Pliny NH* 8.78.210 (on Cato's inveighing against sumptuous banquets); *Cic.* from the lost *Pro Gallio*, quoted by *Quint. Inst.* 8.3.66; *Sen. Ep.* 95.15, *De Brev. Vit.* 1.3–4, 7.1–2; *Columella De Agr.* 1.pr.10–21; *Val. Max.* 2.5.5; *Aur. Med.* 6.13; *Musonius Rufus* 18B. According to *Tac. Ann.* 3.52ff., conspicuous banquets were especially fashionable in the mid-first century AD.
- 32 *Cic. Sen.* 9.30; cf. [ps] *Luc. Makrob.* 23 (over-indulgence in food and drink shortens life expectancy); *Sen.* 58.32 (frugal living can bring one to old age); *Plut. De Lib. Ed.* 11 (training of the body in youth is the foundation of a hale old age); *Macr. Sat.* 7.6.11 (drunkenness accelerates ageing in some men).
- 33 For example, *Cicero*, in his defence of *Caelius*, 1.28–30, 31.76–77. On tolerance for the *ferocitas* of youth, *Eyben* 1993.

- 34 Plut. *Mor.* 8, *Table-talk* 3.3.650; Macr. *Sat.* 7.6.19–2. The drunken old woman was a special topos and will be discussed in [Chapter 7](#).
- 35 Cic. *Caelio* 32.77 ('age, experience and time mellow all'); cf. Sen. *Contr.* 2.6.11.
- 36 On Mark Antony's drinking habits, Plut. *Ant.* 60ff.; Cic. *Phil.* 2.66.8; Dio 50.5; Pliny *NH* 33.50.
- 37 Plut. *Luc.* 39, *An Seni* 785ff.
- 38 On Lucullus' shirking of duty, Plut. *An Seni* 786a.
- 39 Cic. *Sen.* 11.35–36.
- 40 *CIL* 6.15258 (*ILS* 8157). Cic. *Sen.* 13.44–14.46; cf. Plut. *An Seni* 786a; Max. *El.* 1. 159 (written in old age 'I love big meals, soon I regret I ate them'); Hor. *Epist.* 2.2.55.
- 41 For example, Cic. *Sen.* 11.36, 16.58; Sen. *Ep.* 15.4; Luc. *Nigrinus* 27; Gal. *San. Tuenda* 5.3 (moderate exercise puts flesh on the old man's body); Plut. *An Seni* 10.793b; Symmachus, fourth century AD, *Ep.* 5.68.
- 42 Some examples: (swinging) Plut. *An Seni* 793b; (walking) Cic. *Sen.* 10. 34; Pliny *Ep.* 3.1; Plut. *An Seni* 793b; (ball-playing) Pliny *Ep.* 3.1; Plut. *An Seni* 793b; Petronius *Sat.* 27.2; Gal. *Exercise with a Small Ball* 907–908 (Cic. *Sen.* 16.58, saw ball-playing as unsuited to old age); (on carriage rides) Pliny *Ep.* 3.1; Sen. *Ep.* 15.6; Suet. *Vesp.* 2.1; Gal. *San. Tuenda* 5.5; (being carried in a litter) Plut. *An Seni* 793b; Sen. *Ep.* 15.6; (running) Sen. *Ep.* 15.4, 83.4; (declaiming or reading aloud) Cels. *Med.* 2.14; Plut. *An Seni* 793b (adding that declaiming is even better if the mind joins in), *San. Tuenda Praec.* 130a–c.
- 43 Hipp. *Reg.* 2.58; Cels. *Med.* 1.3.4–5; Gal. *San. Tuenda* 5.3.
- 44 Cic. *Sen.* 10.34. On Masinissa's fitness and endurance: Livy *Periocha* 50; Strab. 117.833; Val. Max. 5.2.4, 8.13.1; Luc. *Macr.* 17; Pliny *NH* 7.156; Plut. *An Seni* 791f, quoting Polybius [36.16]; Frontin. *Strat.* 4.3.11. On his sexual potency: Val. Max. 8.13.1; Pliny *NH* 7.61. Many of these references were pointed out by Powell 1988: 171.
- 45 Pliny *Ep.* 3.1. On Spurinna's daily regime, see also [Chapter 5](#).
- 46 The mental aspects of old age will be discussed in [Part II](#).
- 47 Athenaeus, first century AD, *On Healthy Regimen* 7, in Or. *Incerta* 21; trans. Gleason 1995: 85–86. Similarly: Sen. *Ep.* 78.5.
- 48 Athenaeus, in Orib. 3.165–8; Daremberg, as quoted by Edelstein 1967: 310.
- 49 Athenaeus, in Orib. *Incerta* 21; Plut. *San. Tuenda Praec.* 26, *Mor.* 136e–f, 137a.
- 50 Tac. *Ann.* 6.46; cf. Suet. *Tib.* 68.
- 51 Hipp. *Reg.* 3.68; Soranus *Gyn.* 2.24.
- 52 Hipp. *Reg.* 6 has a chapter on women and children, but nothing in particular on old women.
- 53 Oribasius *Incerta* 4.4, 6–7 (carriage rides); Atheneus in Or. *Incerta* 5; Clem. *Alx. Paed.* 3.49, 3.67 (housework); Sor. *Gyn.* 1.49 (on gentle jiggling exercises, but only in certain circumstances, such as travelling).
- 54 Cels. *Med.* 5; cf. Sen. *Ep.* 58.34 ('few have lasted through extreme old age to death without impairment').
- 55 Cic. *Sen.* 5.15, 9.27–38; cf. Plut. *An Seni* 791e; Juncus, second century AD, p. 1049 W.-H.=fr. 85 Stobaeus; a fr. of Diogenes of Oenoanda, second century AD (fr. 60 Chilton=141 Ferguson Smith). See also Musonius fr. 17.25–30, who recommended right training to overcome the decline in physical strength.
- 56 Champlin 1980: 141. Whitehorne, 1977: 416, put the figure at more than 30 per cent (this figure also included the letters on other people's health).
- 57 Fronto was born c. AD 95, the most commonly accepted date of his death is AD 167, but AD 175 is also a possibility; see Champlin 1980: 139–142.
- 58 From his old age: Fronto, *ad Antoninum, Imp.* ii.5, written in AD 163 (Loeb II,

- p. 156), *M. Caes.* V 6 (Loeb I, p. 192), V 12 (I, 198); V 29 (I, 218), dated AD 145–147; V 18 (I, 224), AD 148–149; V 50 (I, 224) (knee), V44 (I, 246), V 45 (I, 246), AD 154–156. See also *Ad amicos* i.13 (Loeb II, 174); i.15 (II, 88). For a list of Fronto's physical complaints: see C.R. Haines II.333 Loeb index (who listed over 60 references to complaints about pains in various parts of his body) and Whitehorne 1977: 415 nn. 13–16.
- 59 Gell. *NA* 2.26.1, 19.10.
- 60 Bowersock 1969: 71–75 (who saw both Fronto and Marcus Aurelius as hypochondriacs) and Whitehorne 1977: 413–421 (who accepted Fronto, but rejected MA as a hypochondriac).
- 61 Fronto, *Ad Verum (?) Imp.* i.1, Loeb II, p. 185. On his feeling old, e.g. *Ad Ambr.* 330, Loeb II, 184–186 (calling old age 'a twilight, that cannot last'), *ad Ant. Imp.* 1.2 (Loeb II, 186–187).
- 62 *M. Aur. Med.* 2.2, 6.13, 7.33, 8.28. His only personal remark on health was a reference to his lack of sleep in 5.1.
- 63 SHA 1.8. Avidius Cassius, governor of Syria, was proclaimed emperor in the East after a false report of M. Aurelius' death on the Danube.
- 64 Whitehorne, 1977: 417–418, estimated that 20 per cent of his extant letters to Fronto were concerned with health (many of these concerned Fronto's health); 16 (out of 53) were on his own health (see Whitehorne 1977: 417 n. 25 for a listing).
- 65 Dio 71.1.2, 72.6.3–4, 72.24.4, 72.36.1ff.; *SHA Marc.* 3.7; *Gal. Prognosis* 11.
- 66 Marcus Aurelius, to Fronto, ed. Van Houten, pp. 75–76.
- 67 Dio 72.24.4; cf. *M. Aur. Med.* 2.2 (saw himself as old).
- 68 *SHA Marc.* 28.1. These biographies have a somewhat doubtful reputation, but it is of note that Dio gives the impression that his disease was not deadly, 72.33.4. See also Van Hooff, 1990: 38, who listed M. Aurelius as having committed suicide under the heading 'weariness of life'. Another version of M. Aurelius' death comes from Dio 72.33.4, who repeated a story that Aurelius was poisoned by his physicians in order to please Commodus.
- 69 Dio 72.6.3. On his pessimistic nature, e.g. *Aur. Med.* 5.10.1, 8.1.11, 10.8.1–2, 11.18.5. His views on death, e.g. *Med.* 4.48. On Aurelius, Rutherford 1989.
- 70 Polemo *Physiognomy* 50.1.260. See also Galen *Mixtures* 2.575ff., who argued that the good, affectionate, generous and wise man has a well-balanced and harmonious body.
- 71 *SHA Ant. Pius* 13.1.
- 72 On the 'face-to-face society' of the second century AD, Gleason 1990: 389. On the relevance of physiognomy to society, Ambrose (second century AD), who refused to receive a priest whose gait showed signs of arrogance, and refused to ordain a man because his gestures were too unseemly (*Paedagogus* 1.18.72, as pointed out by Gleason 1990: 393ff.). On prejudices against human deformity in antiquity (mostly congenital deformities), Garland 1995.
- 73 Pliny *Pan.* 4.7; Septimius Severus, a popular emperor, was described as large and handsome, with a clear voice 'even in old age', *SHA* 21.7–10.
- 74 *Lib. Or.* 1.140ff.
- 75 Clem. Al. *Paed.* 3.11, trans. W. Wilson; Dio Chrysost. *Or.* 33.52. On physiognomy: Gleason 1990: 389–415.
- 76 Sen. *Ep.* 12 and 58.32ff. On optimism on old age also 19.2 (the pleasure of retirement), 26.3 (old age as a time of bloom), 70.2–4.
- 77 Sen. on his health: *Ep.* 26.1 (on feeling physically old), 54.1–2 (asthma), 67, esp. 1–2, 78.1–2, 83.1–5 (tiredness and catarrh), 83.3–5, 96.1 (disease of the bladder), 104.3–5 (fever).
- 78 Sen. *Her. Fur.* 204, 696, 849–850, *Her. Oet.* 1859, *Oct.* 73ff., *Oed.* 656ff., *Phaed.*

- 431, *Med.* 258. On Seneca as a hypochondriac, Griffin 1976: 388; on Seneca and the suffering body, Edwards 1999: 252–268.
- 79 *Ep.* 71.27, 78.10–13, 78.20–21 ('disease can be overcome, or at any rate endured').
- 80 De Luce 1989: 195–216.
- 81 Suet. *Galb.* 21.
- 82 Galba's reign did not last long, he was murdered after about six months in office (AD 68–69).
- 83 On cataracts as a disease of old age, Hipp. *Aph.* 3.31; Arist. *Gen. An.* 780a17ff. On the handicapped citizen: Gardner 1993: ch. 6; Garland 1995: 33.
- 84 Griffin 1986: 64–77, 192–202 (on the philosophical schools' stances to suicide). Suicide because of mental decline will be discussed in [Chapter 3](#).
- 85 Epicurus fr. 138 Usener; Cic. *Fin.* 1.49, 2.95.
- 86 Diogenes of Laertius, 4.3, has the example of the suicide of Speusippus, whose body in old age was wasted away and was said not to have died for a trivial cause.
- 87 Plato *Phaedo* 61d; Cic. *Sen.* 20.73.
- 88 Plato *Phaedo* 62b, *Laws* 9.873 c–d.
- 89 Sen. *Ep.* 30.1–2ff.; cf. *Ep.* 24.24–26, 30.15, 58.32ff., 70.4ff. On Seneca's views on suicide: Griffin 1976: 367–388. On Seneca and suicide, see also [Chapter 3](#).
- 90 Sen. *Ep.* 30.12.
- 91 Pliny *Ep.* 1.12 (on Corellius Rufus), 1.22 (on Aristo); on suicide also 3.7.2, 6.24.
- 92 Tac. *Ann.* 16.34; see also Sen. *Ep.* 78.1–2 (on his aged father, as mentioned above).
- 93 Van Hooff, 1990: 33, noted 49 historical cases of old males committing suicide and five of old women. However, the latter did not kill themselves because of the illnesses of old age, but for political or sentimental reasons.
- 94 Val. Max. 2.6.8. On the Kean tradition, Strabo 10.5.6.
- 95 CIL IX 1164. J.L. Voisin ('Apicata, Antinoüs et quelques autres. Notes d'épigraphie sur la mort volontaire à Rome', *MÉFRA* 99.1, 1987: 276) suggests that Bassulus must have been between approx. 66 and 80 years old.
- 96 Griffin 1986: 199.
- 97 On suicide as a heroic gesture (the so-called 'Stoic martyr literature') Rutherford 1989: 62 (n. 44)–63. See also Y. Grisé (*Le Suicide dans la Rome Antique*, Montreal and Paris, 1982), who saw suicide among the Romans in terms of an epidemic.
- 98 Musonius fr. 28; cf. Sen. *Ep.* 58.34–36.
- 99 Tac. *Ann.* 13.30.
- 100 Hippocratic Oath (n. 4). On euthanasia: Edelstein 1967; J.P. Carrick (*Medical Ethics in Antiquity. Philosophical Perspectives on Abortion and Euthanasia*, Dordrecht, 1985) uses the term 'euthanasia' in the sense of 'easy death' (i.e. suicide).
- 101 Plato *Rep.* 3.407d–406b (who, however, also implies that such a man was no longer useful to society and was therefore no longer worthy of Asklepios' administrations).
- 102 Ov. *Met.* 15.233–236; cf. Plaut. *Men.* 757–758; Hor. *Sat.* 2.2.85–86; Sen. *Oed.* 548ff.
- 103 Plaut. *Asin.* 863, *Merc.* 291, 314ff., *Poen.* 508ff., *Pseud.* 659; Sen. *Her. Fur.* 849–850 (slowness of movement); Plaut. *Men.* 854, *Cur.* 160; Ov. *Met.* 5.14.143, 6.26, 13.533–534 (tottering or trembling limbs); Sen. *Med.* 258; Juv. *Sat.* 10.198; Ov. *Fast.* 3.670, 8.10.414, *Met.* 5.103, 5.99–106, 8.660ff.; Sen. *Phaed.* 1230 (trembling hands and limbs); Hor. *Od.* 4.13.5; Ov. *Fast.* 6.399, 6.415–416 (trembling voice).
- 104 For example, Plaut. *Asin.* 863, *Merc.* 314, *Poen.* 504, *Pseud.* 659.
- 105 Luc. *Tyrann.* 5.23–25; cf. *Dial. Mort.* 9.361ff.

- 106 M. Neuburger (*Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 21, 1947, 113–119) briefly analysed the medical aspect of the *Elegies* and identified many now known geriatric infirmities.
- 107 Max. *Elegy* 1.211–218; trans. L.R. Lind. Tiberius too might have suffered from osteoporosis. According to Tacitus his figure was ‘bent’ in old age (*Ann.* 4.56).
- 108 Juvenal’s 10th satire might have been written when he was in his seventies (P. Green, in his introduction to Juvenal’s *Satires*, 1974: 14, Penguin edn); Maximianus called himself an old man in his elegies.
- 109 Arist. *Rhet.* 1.5.15. Juv. *Sat.* 10.357. Some other examples: Mimnerbus (seventh century BC) Bergk. fr. 21 (who was said to fear the diseases of old age and expressed the wish to die at the age of 60); Hor. *Od.* 1.31.17–20, who prayed to the god Apollo not only for a long life but for one in which body, mind and his creative skills would remain unimpaired; Plaut. *Bacch.* 820–821 ‘Whom the gods hold dear dies young, with strength and sense and mind intact’ (possibly a proverb); Sen. *Ep.* 99.10 (‘Life is full of misery . . . to die young is not so bad’); Val. Max. 9.13 (an early death is preferable to a miserable long life); Is. of Seville *Etym.* (seventh century AD) 2.30 (who saw physical weakness and tedium as the greatest curse of old age).

3 DECLINE OF THE INTELLECT

- 1 Both Hippocrates (in *Pollux Onomastikon* 2.4) and Philo (*De Opificio Mundi* 36.104) took their age classification from Solon, while in turn Hippocrates is likely to have influenced Galen’s *Definitiones Medicae* 104. Hippocrates is also mentioned by Ptolemy (second century AD, *Tetrabiblos* 2) and Macrobius (fourth century AD *Comm.* 1.6.71.77). On the life-course, Wackernagel 1962: 56; Suder 1978: 5–9. Aristotle’s division of the life-course and its characteristics is likely to have influenced Horace’s *Ars Poetica* (as discussed in [Chapter 4](#)).
- 2 Solon *Elegy on the Ages of Men* 11–18; trans. R. Lattimore.
- 3 Mimnermus fr. 21 Bergk.; Solon fr. 6; trans. Lattimore.
- 4 On Solon’s ability to learn: Bergk II, 18(10); cf. Cic. *Sen.* 8.26, 14.50; Plut. *Solon* 2.2, 31.3. See also Plato *Rep.* 7.536d; Val. Max. 8.7.14; [Lucian] *Macr.* 18.
- 5 Arist. *Rhet.* 2.14.4.
- 6 Arist. *Probl.* 955b22–956a5 (with the provision that the mind is only at its best in old age if it is not crippled by any agent, perhaps referring to senility).
- 7 Arist. *Pol.* 7.1329a.
- 8 Lucr. *De Rer. Nat.* 3.445–454; trans. M. Ferguson Smith. Commentaries used on Lucretius’ bk. III include R. Heinze (*T. Lucretius Carus. De Rerum Natura*. Buch III, Leipzig), 1897: 120; Bailey 1947: 1072–1073.
- 9 Lucr. *De Rer. Nat.* 3.136–160; 3.417–423 (relationship mind and soul); cf. 3.548–557 (the mind is part of the body).
- 10 See Powell 1988: 239 for other examples.
- 11 Musonius fr. 17.5–15; cf. Cic. *Sen.* 18.66ff.; Sen. *Ep.* 12.6; Juncus fr. 85 in Stobaeus IV=p. 1030 W.-H.
- 12 Cic. *Sen.* 19.66–67. On preparation for death, e.g. Sen. *Ep.* 12.6, 26.8–10, 30.18, 36.7ff., 69.6. *Brev. Vit.* 7; Plut. *Tranq. An.* 465b, 476d–e; Musonius, fr. 17.
- 13 Philodemus ‘*De Morte*’, col. 9 (‘the increase from childhood to maturity and the whole decline from the summit of age’); Metrodorus fr. *Hercul.* 6, col. 7 (‘the soul striving along with a little body grows in accord with the sustenance of childhood’). On this, Bailey 1947: 1072–1073. Lucretius’ views were extreme and he therefore had his opponents. Lactantius, the 4th c. AD Christian apologist, in *Div. Inst.* 7.12, vehemently refuted Lucretius’ monistic theory, by name and at length.

- 14 Epicurus *Letter to Menoeceus* 122; trans. C. Bailey.
- 15 Ibid., ch. 2.
- 16 Epic. fr. 17 from the Vatican collection. On the metaphor of old age as a safe harbour, see also Cic. *Sen.* 19.71, *Att.* 14.19.1, *Tusc.* 1.118; Sen. *Ep.* 70.3; Plut. *Tranq. An.* 476a (*Mor.* 476); Quint. *Inst.* 12.11.4.
- 17 Diog. of Oenoanda fr. 57 and 62 Chiltern.
- 18 Empedocles fr. 79 Wright 9 (106 Diels), also quoted in Arist. *Metaph.* 1009b17, *De An.* 427a23. Prudentius, *C. Symm.* 2.317–323; August. *De Quantitate Animae* 26–29. On these, and other examples, Bailey 1947: 1073.
- 19 Herodotus 3.134.
- 20 On Isidore's 'borrowing' (without naming his sources) from antiquity: Sharpe 1964: 21.
- 21 On the use of 'senium', Powell 1988: 132, cf. Parkin 1997: 141 n. 63 and Slusanski 1974: 113, 352–354, 566–567. Also Donatus *ad* Terence, *Eunuchus* 2.3.11, who used *senium* as a term of abuse for a decrepit old man.
- 22 See Philo, *De Opificio Mundi* 36.105, advanced age (49–56 years) and old age (56 years onwards).
- 23 On Ptolemy, see e.g. Sears 1986: 48–50; Barton 1994: 107–108.
- 24 Ptol. *Tetr.* 4.10.203–204.
- 25 After the doctrine of the four humours and the physical cooling and drying process which was thought to occur in ageing, as referred to in [Chapter 2](#).
- 26 References to Jupiter as an auspicious planet and Saturn as an inauspicious one are also found in Cic. *Div.* 1.85; Hor. *Od.* II, 22–23; Ov. *Ibis* 209ff.; Juv. *Sat.* 6.569; Lucan, *Bell. Civ.* 1.651.
- 27 On Saturn as a melancholic planet, Kliblansky *et al.* 1964.
- 28 Ptol. *Tetr.* 6.10.
- 29 Is. of Seville *Etym.* 11.2.1–8 and 11.2.30–37.
- 30 Is. of Seville *Etym.* 11.2.8. In an earlier work, *Differentiae* (2.19–21 [74–84] PL 83, 81), Isidore had seen seven stages of life, with the age-span 50–77 (*senectus*) as the sixth stage and *senium* (from 77 onwards) as the seventh stage; in essence not dissimilar to his later *Etymologiae*. On *senium* as the last stage of life, cf. Jerome PL 25.1021.
- 31 Is. of Seville *Etym.* 11.2.30; trans. W.D. Sharpe.
- 32 Seventy was the age old people could in the late Empire, at times, be excused from fulfilling certain public duties (see [Chapter 5](#)). Isidore's age grades therefore partly originated from legal regulations in public life.
- 33 Sen. *Ep.* 58.36; Maximianus *Elegies* 1.125–126; trans. L.R. Lind.
- 34 Neugarten 1974: 187–198; Laslett 1989, 1994 (published when he was well into his seventies, as he himself noted, in his Fourth Age).
- 35 On loss of memory in old age, Plato *Phaedr.* 276d; Arist. *Mem.* 453b; Plaut. *Epid.* 544; Lucr. *De Rer. Nat.* 3.1039–1041; Verg. *Ecl.* 9.51; Ov. *Met.* 12.182 (with reservations); Sen. (elder) *Contr.* 1 pr.2–3; Sen. (Younger) *Oed.* 817 ff.; Plut. *Mor.* 7.650e (*Table-talk* 3); Val. Max. 8.7.1; Suet. *Gram.* 9; Pliny NH 7.24.90; Jerome *Chronicon* 2027, AD 11, PL 27.563–564 (on Messala Corvinus); Juv. *Sat.* 10.233–236; Lact. *Inst.* 7.12.12; Maximianus, *El.* 1.123–126 and 195 ff.; (Anon. second-third century AD) *On the Constitution of the Universe and Of Man* (see J.L. Ideler, *Physici et Medici Graeci Minores*, Berlin 1841, 1, p. 303).
- 36 Lact. *Div. Inst.* 7.12; Sen. *Contr.* 1 pr.2; cf. Arist. *Parv. Nat.* (*De Memoria et Reminiscentia*) 1.450b and 1.453b (saw the memory of both young and old as inferior, because their bodies were in constant flux, the young with rapid growth, the old with decay); Pliny NH 7.24.90.
- 37 Pliny NH 7.24.88. On memory (in general): Cic. *Tusc. Dip.* 1.24.59ff.; Pliny NH

- 7.24.88ff.; Sen. *Contr.* pr.18 (on Latro's memory). On those who were said to have retained a good memory in old age: Cic. *Sen.* 7.21 (on Simonides); Pliny *NH* 25.5.9 (on Castor the botanist); Philostr. *VS* 1.11.495–496 (on Hippias of Elis); Sen. *Contr.* 2.6.13, Sen. *Ep.* 26.2 (on himself); Jerome *Ep.* 10.2 (on Paul of Concordia). Cic. *Sen.* 7.22 (on the need for good memory for priests and augurs). On a good memory for proper names, see p. 69 and n. 48.
- 38 Quint. *Inst.* 12.11.3–4; cf. Tac. *Ann.* 4.52.
- 39 Jerome *Chronicon* 2027, PL 27.563–564. On his oratory, Cic. *Ad. Brutum* I.15.1; Quint. *Inst.* 1.7.35, cf. Sen. *Contr.* 2.4.8.
- 40 On mnemonic techniques: Cic. *Or.* 2.353–360; Quint. *Inst.* 11.2.1–51; (An.) *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 3.16–24.
- 41 Simonides fr. 146 Bergk. (of himself, aged 80); Cic. *Tusc. Dip.* 1.24.59, *Sen.* 7.21.
- 42 Sen. *Contr.* 1 pr. 2–3.
- 43 Lato *ap.* Sen. *Contr.* 2.2.8. Cic. *Sen.* 11.36; similarly cf. Cato *Carmen de Moribus* (*ap.* Gell. *NA* 11.2.6); Ov. *Am.* 1.2.11–12 (who also uses the metaphor that iron gets rusty by disuse); Plut. *An Seni* 783f–784a.
- 44 Cic. *Sen.* 7.21–22.
- 45 Diamond 1964: 70.
- 46 Cic. *Sen.* 11.38. On the Pythagorean habit, Epictetus *Diss.* 3.10; Sen. *De Ira* 3.36 (on Sextius). See Powell, 1988: 179, who suggests this habit may have been a moral exercise.
- 47 Cic. *Sen.* 7.21, cf. 11.36–38 (on exercising the mind).
- 48 Today too, the remembering of people's proper names is seen as fundamental in some environments. In the USA, special mnemonic exercises are taught to businessmen in order to remember people's names, as it flatters people if their names are remembered. On this especially: Tony Buzan, a specialist on brain and memory techniques (*Use your Memory*, London, 1986: 132–149), on ways of remembering names and faces.
- 49 Plut. *Cic.* 7.1–2.
- 50 Cic. *Sen.* 7.21, Val. Max. 8.7.15 (on Themistocles). Falconer (LCL ed. of Cic. *Sen.*) suggests the citizens of Athens were then probably about 20,000 in number. For a list of people with good memory (not just in old age), see Powell 1988: 148.
- 51 My italics. Sen. *Contr.* 1 pr.3–4.
- 52 Cohen 1990: 193–204 ('Many people report that, as they grow older they find increasing difficulty in retrieving proper names . . .') Of interest is a poem by the twentieth-century poet Philip Larkin: 'Perhaps being old is having lighted rooms/Inside your head, and people in them acting./People you know, yet can't quite name' ('The Old Fools': lines 25–27).
- 53 See Wilcock 1999: 17; Gidley and Sears 1985: 23.
- 54 Sen. *Contr.* 1 pr.3 and 4.
- 55 Lucr. *De Rer. Nat.* 3.1039–1041.
- 56 On the failure to recognise people as a symptom of insanity, Plaut. *Men.* 961; Sen. *Contr.* 2.4.2.
- 57 The Latin terminology for dementia is confused. The word *dementia* is used in the rhetorical schools and in some literary writings. Other terms, such as *senilis stultia*, *deliration*, *mentis inops*, *nec sentit senium*, or *bis pueri senis* are also used. Also of importance is the difference between *senectus* and *senium* (where the term *senium* clearly referred to those of reduced mental capabilities, as discussed on p. 64). Lawyers commonly used *furor* or *furiosus* for insanity, usually not differentiating between insanity and senile dementia; but *dementia*, or *demens*, also occurs. On the legal terminology, see Schultz 1951: 197–199; Gardner 1993: 168, 175; Parkin 1997: 146–147 n. 88. The Hippocratic *Aphorisms* (3.31) did not include senile

- dementia in the list of known diseases of old age. This, and the impression that the classical texts did not show many specific references to senility, made Finley believe (1989: 17) that the Romans were not very aware of dementia. On senility in antiquity, Parkin 1997: 139–148.
- 58 Gal., second century AD, *The Soul's Dependence on the Body*, 786; cf. Aretaeus, second century AD, 3.6.2 (senility is caused by the cooling of the body). See also Ptolemy's correlation between the cooling of the body and a declining intellect, mentioned on p. 65.
 - 59 Is. of Seville *Etym.* 11.2.27; trans. W.D. Sharpe (on his 'borrowing' from antiquity, see n. 20). For an opposite view, correlating the word 'senes' with wisdom, see Cic. *Sen.* 6.19, 16.56, *Rep.* 2.50; Plut. *An Seni* 789e; Ov. *Fasti* 5.57.
 - 60 The second century AD jurist Gaius (*Inst.* 3.109) compared the mentally ill with under-age children; they both lack understanding (see Gardner 1993: 168). See also Parkin, 1997: 128, who noted the dependency of both infants and the old men on others, and Wiedemann 1989 (on the marginality of children).
 - 61 Plaut. *Merc.* 295–296, 976, *Trin.* 43; Luc. *Sat.* 9.
 - 62 Cato *Dict. Cat.* 4.18. See also Varro *Men. Sat.* fr. 91 Bücheler=Aul. Gell. NA 7.5.10, referring to Varro's satire; Plaut. *Merc.* 295–296, 976, *Trin.* 43; Luc. *Sat.* 9, Auson. 13.1 Sch.; Sen. *Historiae*, ap. Lact. *Inst.* 7.15.14; Clem. Al. *Strom.* 6.2.19.5–8. On the proverb: Otto 1962: 316–317.
 - 63 On the use of *Dicta* as a tool of persuasion: Laurence and Paterson 1999: 183–197.
 - 64 Cic. *Sen.* 7.22, cf. 11.36. On Cato's character, e.g. A.E. Astin (*Cato, the Censor*, Oxford, 1978); Gruen 1993: 52–83.
 - 65 See e.g. Fronto, *Letters to his Friends* 1.3.
 - 66 For example, Cic. *Sen.* 20.72 ('the most desirable end of life is that which comes while the mind is clear'); cf. Sen. *Ep.* 58.33 ('old age] is the purest and clearest part of all, provided only that the mind is unimpaired').
 - 67 Sen. *Ep.* 58.35; Aur. *Med.* 3.1, trans. Rutherford; cf. 5.29, 8.47, 10.32.
 - 68 Laslett, 1989: 14ff.
 - 69 Juv. *Sat.* 10.239. Similarly: Sen. Cic. throughout *Sen.*, Diog. of Oenoanda, fr. 56 Chiltern ('live to the last day of their lives with their faculties unimpaired') and fr. 63; Sen. *Ep.* 26.2–3, 58.33, 70.1–2.
 - 70 Lucr. *De Rer. Nat.* 3.1039–1041 (on Democritus); Jerome *Chronicon* 2027, PL 27.563–564, Pliny NH 7.24.90.
 - 71 Cole and Gadow 1986: xii (on Freud).
 - 72 Plut. *Solon* 21; cf. [Aristotle] *Athenaion Politeia* 56.6. On this law see Harrison 1968: 79–80 (who sees no instance of such a case); Parkin, 1997: 143; Powell 1988: 151–152. See also Plato *Laws* 11.929d–e, who recommended that an old man convicted of senile incompetence should no longer be master of his estate, but should dwell in his own household as a *päis* for the rest of his life. Plato therefore emphasised the senile old man's economic dependency.
 - 73 Cic. *Sen.* 7.22; cf. Anon. *Vita Soph.* 13; Plut. *An Seni* 785a–b; [Lucian] *Macr.* 24; Apuleius *Apol.* 37; Jerome *Ep.* 52.3.6; Val. Max. 8.7.12.
 - 74 Cic. *Sen.* 7.22.
 - 75 XII *Tables* 5.7, *Digest* 27.10 and reported on by Cic. *De Inv.* 2.50.11; [Cic] *ad Herennium* 1.13.25. See Gardner 1993: 169 and 228 n. 32, and pp. 167–169 on the legal implication of insanity in general. On this law, see Schultz 1951: 197. It was legally allowed for a son to be his father's *curator*, as was stated in *Dig.* 27.10.1.pr (Ulpian), 27.10.13 (Gaius).
 - 76 Parkin 1997: 146. On the legal terminology of insanity, see n. 57 above.
 - 77 Plut. *Vit. Luc.* 43.1.

- 78 Livy 5.18.4–5.
- 79 Posidonius (first century BC), fr. 255 Edelstein-Kidd.
- 80 Plut. *Mar.* 45.3–7, 45.12.
- 81 Tac. *Ann.* 6.38; cf. Dio 58.25.2.
- 82 Wilcock 1999: 118–136; Gidley and Sears 1985: 35–48.
- 83 Tac. *Ann.* 4.57 and 6.51; cf. Suet. *Tib.* 42.2.

4 NEGATIVE MENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

- 1 Hor. AP 175–176. On the idea of a curve of life, Eyben 1973b: 214ff.
- 2 Hor. AP 169–174. On Horace's *Ars Poetica*, esp. Colmant 1956; Grimal 1968; Brink 1971.
- 3 Hor. AP 157; similarly Arist. *Rhet.* 2.12; cf. Cic. *De Or.* 1.52.223.
- 4 Hor. *Epist.* 22.2.55–57.
- 5 Colmant 1956: 62. Of interest is a finding from contemporary research: 'The uniqueness of human personality is especially pronounced in old age; the aged are manifesting an even wider range of personality characteristics than their younger contemporaries' (Aiken 1989: 123).
- 6 Arist. *Rhet.* 2.12–15. Horace may well have been inspired by Aristotle (see Grimal 1968: 170).
- 7 On *media aetas* as the perfect balance between old and young, see also Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* 1.6.75.
- 8 On moroseness as a character trait of old age, e.g. Isocr. *Panth.* 234c; Arist. *Rhet.* 2.13; [Arist.] *Probl.* 30.1.29ff.; Cic. *Sen.* 18.65 (a refutation); Menedemus in Ter. *Heaut.*; Ptol. *Tetr.* 4.10.207; J. Chrysost. *Ep. ad Titum* 2.4, *Ep. ad Hebr.* 7.9.
- 9 Galen, *On the Body*, 810. *On the Constitution of the Universe and of Man* (second–third century AD, published by J.L. Ideler, *Physici et Medici Graeci Minores*, Berlin 1841, I, pp. 303–304). On this, Sears, 1986: 15; cf. Kliblansky *et al.* 1964: 58–59, 64 (who argued that in medieval times and in the Renaissance it was quite common to look at the four humours for the disposition of man).
- 10 Ov. *Met.* 15.199–213; Prudent. *C. Symm.* pref.; cf. in scientific texts and cosmology: e.g. Diog. Laert. *Vita Philosophorum* (Pythagoras) 8.10; Arist. *Gen. An.* 784a14–19; Ptol. *Tetrabl.* 1.10.28–30.
- 11 For example, Arist. *Rhet.* 2.13.16, cf. NE 1158; Catullus 5.2; Cic. *Sen.* 18.65 (a refutation); Hor. AP 173; Sen. *De Ir.* 2.19.4 (old men are difficult and quarrelsome); J. Chrysost. *Ep. ad Titum* 2.4 (mentioning pusillanimousness among a number of negative qualities of old age); Amm. Marc. 27.7.4 (the old can no longer control their anger because of a weakness of the intellect). See also the character of the *senex iratus* in Roman comedy, as discussed on p. 80.
- 12 Arist. *Rhet.* 2.13.16; Plato *Rep.* 1.3.329; Cic. *Sen.* 18.65; Musonius fr. 17.30–35 (slights and neglect by friends and neighbours). On the term 'stigmatisation', Hockey and James 1993: 45ff.
- 13 Plato *Rep.* 1.3.329. (Cephalus was said to be of 'extreme old age', while Socrates, Cephalus' antagonist, was in his late fifties and was, as he said, 'on the threshold of old age'.)
- 14 Cic. *Sen.* 18.65; Sen. *De Ira* 2.19.4, cf. 3.9.4; Libanius of Antioch (fourth century AD, *Or.* 1.140ff.) who thought himself accused of irascibility when suffering from gout. See also Musonius, fr. 17.30–35, who admonishes the old who fret at the weakness of their body. It is now known that unusual irritability in the old can be a symptom of Alzheimer's disease (Wilcock 1999: 54).
- 15 Cic. *Ep. Att.* 14.21.3 (11 May 44 BC). This letter was written shortly after he finished *De Senectute*; he was then aged 62 and Atticus 65. Cicero once referred to

- his work as *De Senectute* (*Div.* 2.3) and twice as *Cato Maior* (*Lael.* 4; *Ep. Att.* 14.21), its full title being *Cato Maior de Senectute*. Modern scholars commonly refer to it as *De Senectute*.
- 16 Cic. *Sen.* 1.2.
 - 17 Cic. *Ad Att.* 14.21.3. Cicero also wrote a *consolatio* after Tullia's death (*Ad Att.* 12.14.3; Plut. *Cic.* 48.3), which suggests he genuinely believed in the therapeutic value of a *consolatio*, as was noted by Powell 1988: 3–4.
 - 18 Dio 56.3.
 - 19 For example, Simo in Ter. *Adr.*, Demipho in *Phorm.*, Demea in *Ad.*, Menedemus in *Heaut.*; Nicobulus in Plautus' *Bac.*, Theopropides in *Most.*, Periphanes in *Epid.*, Demipho in *Cist.* See also Hor. *Sat.* 1.2.17; Ov. *Met.* 14.587. In comedy, older women too were seen as quarrelsome.
 - 20 Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1158a1–7; Musonius fr. 17.20.
 - 21 Isocr. *Panath.* 88; Arist. *Rhet.* 2.13.12, *Probl.* 30.1.955a; Cic. *Sen.* 10.31, 14.46, 16.55; Hor. *AP* 173–174; *Anth. Pal.* 7.731; Ov. *Met.* 9.550–551; Dio Chrys. *Euboicus* 1; Maximian 1.204; Plut. *Mor.* 8 (*Table-Talk* 3); Max. *El.* 1.197–209, 6.1.
 - 22 Cic. *Sen.* 16.55; cf. 13.46.
 - 23 Plato, too, has the old Cephalus comment on his enjoyment in the pleasures of talk, which increased in old age, when the pleasures of the body decreased: *Rep.* 1.328; see also *Anth. Pal.* 7.417.
 - 24 Pliny, *Ep.* 3.1 (Spurinna), cf. 4.23.2–3 (Pomponius Bassus); Lucian, *Saturnalia* 7 (on the talkative retired Cronus).
 - 25 Clem. Al. *Paidagōgos* 2.7 ('Good speech is the characteristic of experienced, mature age'; see also Cic. *Sen.* 4.10, 5.13 (who admired the speech of the 72-year-old Fabius Maximus); Diogenes of Oenoanda fr. 142 Smith=61 Chilton; Plut. *An Seni* 792e (good speech depended on the experience, reasoning powers and good judgement of the old)).
 - 26 Theophrastus (*Characters*) defined garrulity as 'delivery of talk that is irrelevant, or long and unconsidered' (3.1–2) and loquacity as 'incontinence of speech' (7.1).
 - 27 See e.g. Philto in Plaut. *Trin.*; Cic. *Sen.* 9.27; Max. *El.* 1.197–208. In a version of the myth *Hom. Hymn to Aphrodite*, Tithonus, in extreme old age, changed into a cicada, with idle chatter.
 - 28 Gleason 1995: 98–99; Plut. *Mor.* 784a. Garrulous old women appear in Plaut. *Trin.* 500, *Cist.* 120–121, 149; Cat. 68.46; Cic. *De Nat. Deor.* 3.5.12; Apul. *Apol.* 25; *Anth. Pal.* 7.459 (Callimachus), 11.72 (Bassus of Smyrna); Ov. *Fasti* 2.571–582; Lact. *Inst.* 5.1.26. On the garrulity of the *anus*, see also Otto 1962: 28.
 - 29 Aiken 1989: 122.
 - 30 Arist. *Rhet.* 2.13.12; Hor. *AP* 173–174 (for text, see p. 76).
 - 31 Max. *Elegy* 1.197–208; trans. L.R. Lind.
 - 32 Pliny *Ep.* 5.6.5–6; cf. 3.1.6 (Pliny said to have felt inspired by his friend Spurinna's stories about great men and their deeds of the past); cf. Plato, *Rep.* 1.326e, who suggested that the young can learn from talking to old people.
 - 33 Holmes 1983: 119–121. See also Butler, 1963: 65–76, who emphasised the need for a life review, which helps the elderly to make sense of life, and Falkner, 1995: 18, who noted that the elderly's habit of talking about the past may also have had a physiological cause: as short-term memory declines, the past comes nearer (on this, [Chapter 3](#)).
 - 34 Quint. *Inst.* 12.11.5ff.; cf. Pliny *Ep.* 2.3.
 - 35 Plut. *Mor.* 7.546ff.
 - 36 Cic. *Sen.* 17.62.
 - 37 Juncus fr. 85=Stobaeus IV (in his charge against old age). Max. *El.* 1.197–208; cf. Plato *Rep.* 1.3.329; Cic. *Sen.* 18.65.

- 38 Plut. *Mor.* 7.546ff.; Musonius fr. 17.20 (on old men's pleasure in 'justly' praise); cf. Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1127a17ff. defining self-praise only as boasting, if one pretends to have distinguished qualities which one either does not possess at all or possess to a lesser degree.
- 39 Hom. *Il.* 1.260, 7.124, 11.668, 23.629ff. On Nestor's boasting, e.g. Cic. *Sen.* 10.31; Plut. *Mor.* 544d–f; Plut. *An. Seni* 789f; [Luc.] *Macr.* 3; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 2.20, 2.23; cf. Cic. *Sen.* 10.31; Pliny, *Ep.* 4.3 (on Nestor's 'sweet-talk' and eloquence in old age). That Nestor's advice was taken seriously is mentioned by Juncus (second century AD) Stobaeus pp. 1064.4ff. W.H. On Nestor's reputation, see Falkner 1995: 18.
- 40 Cic. *Sen.* 10.31.
- 41 Powell 1988: 166. On Nestor's, Cato's and Cicero's fondness for boasting, Plut. *Mor.* 544d–f, 544c, 540f (resp.), on Cicero cf. Quint. *Inst.* 11.1.17; *Vit. Cic.* comp. 2.1–2 (seen here as an unpleasant trait).
- 42 See n. 13 above.
- 43 Maslow 1987.
- 44 On miserliness in old age in antiquity: e.g. Arist. *Rhet.* 2.13.6, *Eth. Nic.* 1121b13–14; [Cato] *Dist.* 3.9; Demipho in Ter. *Phorm.*, Menedemus in *Heaut.*, Her. 507, *Ad.* 833ff. ('In all other respects, we get wiser as we get older, there is only one flaw that old age brings, we all think too much of money'); Plautus' Euclio in *Aulularia* (who is thought to have been a model for Molière's *L'Avare*), Gripus in *Rud.* 937; Cic. *Sen.* 18.65 (with reservations); Sen. *De Const.* 12.1–3; Max. *Elegy* 1.188–194.
- 45 On the lack of social security in old age, see Chapter 8. On nest-eggs: Hor. *Sat.* 1.1.28ff., 2.3.17ff.; Verg. *Georg.* 1.186; *Dig.* 32.79.1. On avariciousness, Hor. *Sat.* 14.107–139 (depicted the old as continuously toiling, an exercise which turned into a madness the old were unable to stop); Juv. *Sat.* 14.135–137 (old age was not specifically mentioned, but was implied). On misers in general: Hor. *Sat.* 1.1.28ff.; 2.3 (avarice as a folly of mankind), *Epod.* 2; Plut. *Mor.* 7 (who sees avarice itself as ageing, after Hesiod's *Works and Days*, 705); Sen. *Ep.* 17.5. See *Anth. Pal.* 11.165–173 for a group of epigrams on misers, some old, some of indeterminable age.
- 46 Cato, *Moral Distichs* 3.10; cf. Chrysost. *Ep. ad Hebr.* 7.9.
- 47 Cic. *Sen.* 18.65–66; *Anth. Pal.* 11.168; cf. 10.60 (Palladas); 11.389 (Lucilius); Lucian *Downward Journ.* 20ff.
- 48 Arist. *Rhet.* 2.13.6–7.
- 49 On poverty in old age, e.g. Diog. *ap* Diog. Laert. 6.51; Plato *Rep.* 1.329; Cic. *Sen.* 3.8; Musonius fr. 17.20–25; Juncus in Stobaeus, *Florilegium* 50.2.85. See also Chapter 8.
- 50 Other emperors, too, were described as 'mean'. Pertinax was depicted as a 'mean old man' (*SHA* 12.2 and 13.4); on Galba's greed and meanness in old age (aged 72), Suet. *Galba* 12, 14, 16–17. It is not recorded whether these emperors only became mean in old age or whether this trait was intrinsic.
- 51 Suet. *Tib.* 49.
- 52 Arist. *Rhet.* 1.5.3.
- 53 Plut. *An. Seni* 786b.
- 54 Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1121b.
- 55 This did not mean that moral courage was ignored, as will be discussed below. On a definition of moral courage see Cic. *De Off.* 1.78–83 and Arist. *NE* 1115a6–1117d25.
- 56 Val. Flac. (first century AD) *Argon.* 6.283–284.
- 57 Arist. *Rhet.* 2.13.7–8, *NE* 11007b18.

- 58 Horace *AP* 172; cf. Ptol. *Tetrabl.* 4.10.205–207 (on the lack of spirit in old age).
- 59 Livy 28.43ff.; cf. 28.40ff.
- 60 Plut. *Fab. Max.* 25.1ff., comparison 2.3–4. Maximus had used delaying tactics on a previous occasion, in 217 BC, which earned him the name *Cunctator* (the Delayer), a caution which was on this occasion admired by Plutarch and many others, as Fabius' decision to delay defeated Hannibal and saved the state (he was then aged about 58). Fabius Maximus' caution was therefore intrinsic, but it was held against him (at least by some) in old age. On Plutarch's dislike of ambition in old age, *An Seni* 794c ff.
- 61 Val. Max. 3.8.2.
- 62 Sen. *Contr.* 7.7.13–14.
- 63 Plut. *Fab. Max.* 5.4ff.; Val. Max. 3.8.2.
- 64 Cic. *Sen.* 20.72; similarly Seneca *Ep.* 104.4, who suggested that one of the greatest advantages of old age was the opportunity to neglect self-preservation and to use life more adventurously. On Solon also: Plut. *An Seni* 794e–795a, *Solon* 31; Arist. *Constitution of Athens* 14.2.
- 65 Plut. *An Seni* 794e–f; on this incident see also [Chapter 5](#).
- 66 Plut. *An Seni* 784a (charging them with 'idleness, cowardliness and effeminacy').
- 67 In contemporary research, too, it was found that older people were more timid and cautious in manner than the young, see e.g. Botwinick 1984: 155–158.
- 68 Cic. *Sen.* 18.65; cf. 4.10 (age has not altered his [Fabius Maximus'] disposition).
- 69 Sen. *Ep.* 58.22 ('none of us is the same man in old age that he was in youth'), *Ep.* 118.14 ('a person once a child, becomes a youth; his peculiar quality is transformed; for the child could not reason, but the youth possesses reason. Certain things not only grow in size as they develop, they grow into something else').
- 70 See also Augustine *Serm.* 216, *PL* vol. 38, C.8, col. 1081 ('By means of these divisions or stages of age, you will not change from one state to another but, staying the same, you will always know newness . . . For the second age will not follow so that an end may be put to the first; nor will the use of the third mean the ruin of the second; nor will the fourth be born so that the third may die . . . and so on, up and including the seventh and final stage).
- 71 For an overview of the various theories (from research conducted mainly in the UK or USA), see e.g. Neugarten 1977; Botwinick 1984: 155–158; Kaufman 1986; Aiken 1989: 116–118; Coleman 1993: 82–96.
- 72 In longitudinal research, the same people are interviewed after an interval of a number of years.
- 73 See Puner 1978: 7 (for Priestley's quotation). Also Comfort 1990: 24 ('Aging has no effect upon you as a person. When you are "old" you will feel no different and be different from what you are now or when you were young, except that more experiences will have happened. In age, your appearance will change, however, and you may encounter more physical problems. When you do, these will affect you only as physical problems affect a person of any age').
- 74 Neugarten 1977: 626–649; cf. Aiken 1989: 116–118.
- 75 Aiken 1989: 111 (who saw personality as a product of the interaction between heredity and environment).
- 76 On this view (called 'stage theories' in modern psychology), Botwinick 1984: 144–145; Aiken 1989: 113–115.
- 77 Ter. *Hec.* 737–738; see also Aristotle's definition of beauty in old age, which is defined as 'not causing annoyance to others, thanks to the absence of the disagreeable accompaniments of old age' (*Rhet.* 1.5.11).
- 78 Thompson 1990: 107–108.
- 79 Kaiser and Chandler 1988: 692–699.

5 WISDOM AND EXPERIENCE

- 1 Cic. *Sen.* 3.9; cf. 2.4, 11.38, 18.62–63. From the pagan texts: Arist. *ap.* Diog. Laert. 5.21 (education and the practice of virtue is the best viaticum for old age), *NE* 1143a32ff. (nobody is endowed by nature with wisdom); Varro *Catus de Liveris Educandi* fr. 9; Mus. fr. 17.25, 35; *Sen. Brev. Vit.* 111.9, *Ep.* 20. Also in comedy: Plaut. *Trin.* 367–368. In the Christian texts: Jer. *Ep.* 52.3 (need for right training); J. Chrysost. *Ep. ad Hebr.* 7.3 ('those who deviate from the path of righteous living cannot know wisdom, nor can they expect reverence').
- 2 For example, Cic. *Off.* 1.153–154.
- 3 Arist. *NE* 1143a32–b17, *Rhet.* 2.12–14; Aur. *Med.* 11.1 (wisdom and the age of forty go together); cf. Luc. *Hermotimus* 13.
- 4 Cic. *Tusc.* 1.39.94, cf. *Off.* 1.123; *Phil.* 22.123, *Sen.* 6.17 ('it is not by muscle, speed, or physical dexterity that great things are achieved, but by reflection, force of character and judgement; in these qualities old age is usually not poorer, but is even richer'), 6.15, 6.19, 6.20, 9.38, 9.67; Plut. *An Seni* 797e–f, 788b ff., 789d–e, 790c, 791b, 792d–e; *Sen. Ep.* 36, 68, 76.1–2. See also Sallust *Cat.* 6.6; Juncus 4.50a27; Jer. *Ep.* 52.3.
- 5 Clem. Al. *Paid.* 3, trans. W. Wilson; cf. Aug. *Div. Quaest.* 58a ND 64; PL 40m cols 43abd55; *Epist.* 213.1, PL 33, col. 966; *Serm.* 211, 216; *Discourse on Ps.* 91; Origen *Hom.* 6; Ambr. *Hex.* 1.31 CSEL 32, *Abr.* II 9.65 CSEL 32.1.620; Jerome 52.3 (with reservations); J. Chrysost. *Ep. ad Hebr.* 7.3 (with reservations).
- 6 Some exceptional children were thought to have been granted the wisdom of age prematurely, as, for example, in the panegyric texts (to some royal children) and in the Christian texts (to some young saints). On the *puer senex*, Carp 1980: 736–739; Wiedemann 1989: 75 and 83 n. 50, 93, 109 n. 20; Minois 1989: 117–118; Eyben 1993: 237 n. 88.
- 7 Cic. *Sen.* 3.9 (as quoted above) and 18.62. On the advantages of *auctoritas* in old age, also *Sen.* 17.61–63.
- 8 Musonius fr. 17; *Sen. Brev. Vit.* 14.2.
- 9 *Sen. Ep.* 20.1, 71.
- 10 Jer. *Ep.* 52.3.70, *Ep.* 58.1; cf. Ambr. *Ep.* 16.5; Aug. *Mor. Eccl.* 1.10.17; J. Chrysost. *Ep. ad Hebr.* 8. See also Minois 1989: 120–123; Cole 1992: 9.
- 11 *Sen. Brev. Vit.* 73 (philosophy prepares one for old age and death); similarly Sallust *Cat.* 6.6; Cic. *Tusc.* 1.94. See also Cicero's reason for writing *De Senectute*, as discussed in Chapter 4.
- 12 *Sen. Ep.* 12.4.; my italics.
- 13 Musonius fr. 5.2, cf. fr. 6; Diog. Laert. 4.50 (on Theophrastus); *Sen. Ep.* 15.5, 80.2–3. Also e.g. Plato *Rep.* 498b–c, *Tim.* 88 b–c; Cic. *Off.* 1.123, 7.21ff. (on memory), 11.38; Pliny *Ep.* 3.1.4 (on Spurinna); Plut. *An Seni* 788b; *Sen. Contr.* 2.2.8.
- 14 Cic. *Sen.* 11.38; cf. *Tusc.* 1.94; Sallust *Cat.* 6.6.
- 15 For a description of these duties in full, *Dig.* (Hermogenian) 50.4.1.1–4. The poor were excused from the undertaking of financial burdens, but had to perform the physical services, *Dig.* 50.4.4.2.
- 16 For example, *Dig.* 50.4.6.4 (Ulpian), 50.5.10 (Paul), 50.5.11 (Hermogenian), 50.6.6 (Callistratus).
- 17 *Dig.* 50.5.1 (Ulpian). On release and exemptions from certain *munera* because of age: *Dig.* 50.4.3.6 (Ulpian) (someone over 75 is exempt from civil *munera*, if his sons are taking over his duties); 50.4.3.12 (Ulpian) (exemption for someone aged 70); 50.5.1.3 (Ulpian) (someone over 65 with three living sons is not automatically exempted); cf. 50.5.2.1 (similarly, someone over the age of 70 with three living sons is not automatically exempted); 50.5.2.7 (Ulpian) (someone who is

- very weighed down with old age and bodily infirmity can be released from transporting money); 50.5.8.1 (Papinian); 50.6.4 (Ulpian).
- 18 For example, Pliny *Ep.* 3.7.6–7 (on the 70-year-old Silius Italicus); Pliny *Ep.* 2.1.4 and 9 (on Verginius Rufus, who had to excuse himself from membership of the commission set up by the senate to reduce public expenditure at the age of 83).
 - 19 FIR 10 (FIRA 1.7), 13; as pointed out by Balsdon 1969: 169.
 - 20 The ‘bridges’ (in the saying) were narrow passages made in order to keep spectators at a distance when voting occurred; see Cic. *Leg.* 3.17.38. On this, also Ov. *Fasti* 5.633ff.; Fest. 452L, quoting Verrius Flaccus. Others tell of legends of an old tradition where *sexagenarii* were thrown off the Sulpician bridge into the Tiber to be drowned, either to get rid of the surplus population after the capture of Rome by the Gauls in 390 BC, or as human sacrifices, for which later dummy figures, made from rushes, were used; on the latter Dion. of Hal. 1.38.3. These people were described as ‘*depontani*’. For other interpretations of the saying: Ov. *Fasti* 5.621–662, 5.633–634 (see also the Loeb edition [1989: 425–429] of Ovid’s *Fasti*); cf. Catullus 17; Lucius Afranius fr. 301 (Repudiatu 8); Varro *ap* Non. Marc. 842 Lindsay=523M; Cic. *Pro Rosc. Am.* 35.100; Macrobian *Sat.* 1.5.10. In modern scholarship, Néraudeau 1978: 158–174; Baldwin 1976: 222–223; Suder 1995: 36.
 - 21 Livy (aged 46) 43.14.6 (169 BC), (aged 50) 40.26.7 (181 BC), 42.31.4 (171 BC), 42.33.4 (171 BC); cf. Sen. *Brev. Vit.* 20.4.
 - 22 Gell. NA 10.28.1, citing Tubero (writing on Servius Tullius) as his source; cf. Censorinus *De Die Natali* 14.2 (*seniores* up to 60); on emergency call-out only: Livy 10.21. See also Nicolet 1980: 97 and Allason-Jones 1989: 56 (there was no compulsory age of retirement for centurions).
 - 23 Ov. *Fasti* 6.88, 5.59; cf. Cicero *Sen.* 6.17–18 (the old should advise which wars should be waged and how).
 - 24 Based on an interpretation of a remark by Dio, 55.3.1, who may have alluded to Augustus’ *Lex Julia de Senatu Habendo* of 9 BC, as argued by Talbert 1984: 152. See also Suder 1995: 36.
 - 25 Pliny *Ep.* 4.23.3; cf. Varro *De Vita Pop. Rom.* fr. ap. Non. P. 523 M; [ps] Quint. *Declam.* 306=p. 203.1 Ritter. See also Cic. *Sen.* 11.35, who referred to exemptions (by law and by custom) from those public services which cannot be rendered without strength of body.
 - 26 Sen. *Contr.* 1.8.4 (age 65, quoting the rhetorician Publius Asprenas as his source); Sen. *Brev. Vit.* 20.4 (aged 60). See McAlindon 1957: 108; Mommsen 1887/8: 917 n. 2.
 - 27 Talbert 1984: 153, referring to Fronto *Ant. Imp.* 15.1=p. 95 H (on Fronto’s health, see [Chapter 2](#)).
 - 28 The institution of *patria potestas* will be considered further in [Chapter 8](#). Livy 1.9; cf. Sallust *Cat.* 6.6. See also Cicero’s reference to the semantic connection between age and seniority, *Sen.* 19.64; cf. Plut. *An Seni* 789e; similarly Ov. *Fasti* 5.59–78.
 - 29 Cic. *Off.* 1.33.123; cf. *Sen.* 5.15ff.
 - 30 Plut. *An Seni* 787c–f, 796a. On Marius: Plut. *Lucullus* 38 (518), *Vit. Mar.* 45.6–7.
 - 31 On lack of ambition in old age: Cic. *Pro Caelio* 31.76, *Sen.* 6.17; Pliny *Ep.* 3.1.2; Plut. *Marc.* 28.2–3; Quint. *Inst.* 2.12.12; Sen. *Ep.* 74.21; Servius (fourth century AD) *Commentum Aendaedum* 6.114. On freedom from envy, Quint. *Inst.* 12.11.4–7; Plut. *An Seni* 796b.
 - 32 Epigraphic evidence: L. Volusius Saturninus, who died aged 93, *AE* 7.174 (see also n. 57 below); also A. Atilius Calatinus, who had, according to Cicero, *Sen.* 17.61, engraved on his tombstone: ‘All peoples say of him who lieth here; He was

- his country's very foremost man'; see also *RE* 2.2079ff. Textual examples, e.g. Pliny *Ep.* 3 (Spurinna), 4.3 (Arrius Antoninus), 2.1, 6.10, 9.19 (Verginius Rufus).
- 33 Cic. *Sen.* 17.61.
- 34 Val. Max. 8.7.1.
- 35 Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 24.
- 36 On Cicero's names: Cic. *Sen.* 6.15, 9.30, 13.43, 17.61. For the career details of these names I am indebted to Powell 1988: 135–136, 231.
- 37 Livy 44.41.1 (his elogium is partly preserved, *CIL* 1.194). On his life, see Plutarch.
- 38 On Appius' action/speech: Cic. *Brut.* 55, 61, *Cael.* 34, *Tusc.* 5.112, *Phil.* 1.11, *Sen.* 6.16; Ov. *Fast.* 6.203; Sen. *Ep.* 114.13; Quint. 2.16.7; Val. Max. 8.13.5; Suet. *Tib.* 2.1; Flor. 1.13.20; Plut. *An Seni* 794e–f, *Pyrrhus* 18–19; Ampelius (third/fourth century AD) 19.2; *Dig.* 1.2.2.36.
- 39 Plut. *Pyrrh.* 18.4–5. We do not know Appius' exact age at the time, but Cicero wrote (*Sen.* 6.16): 'it is known that he was undoubtedly an old man at the time of the war with Pyrrhus'.
- 40 Plut. *Pyrrh.* 18.6.
- 41 Cic. *Brut.* 16.62; cf. *Sen.* 6.16.
- 42 Plut. *Pyrrh.* 19.
- 43 Frontin. *Str.* 4.1.18.
- 44 Appian *Samm.* 10.1, and implied by Plut. *An Seni* 794e.
- 45 *Dig.* 3.1.1.5; Cic. *Tusc.* 5.112; cf. *Sen.* 11.37. Ulpian stated that a blind man could retain a magistracy already entered upon, but is forbidden to seek another. He could also act as a judge but not an advocate, because he would be unable to see and show respect to the magisterial insignia (*Dig.* 3.1.1.5 [Ulpian]). On this, Gardner 1993: 158. See also L. Valerius Catullus Messalinus, who was old, blind, and an informer for Domitian: Juv. *Sat.* 4. 113ff.; Pliny *Ep.* 4.22.5; Tac. *Agr.* 45. Also Val. Max. 8.7.4–5, who has several examples of men who became blind in old age and did not let this stand in their way.
- 46 On the role of a *consiliarius*, Crook 1955.
- 47 Tac. *Ann.* 1.27 (on his age, see Jackson, Loeb, p. 288). On Lentullus, *RE* 181; Crook 1955: 35 and 161.
- 48 Juv. *Sat.* 4. On this satire, see Griffith 1969: 134–150.
- 49 Juv. *Sat.* 4.81–93.
- 50 Sherwin-White 1966: 143.
- 51 On Crispus' career, Griffith 1969: 139 and *RE* 39. In the ancient text: Quint. 5.13.48 and 10.1.119 (on his speech); Tac. *Dial.* 8.3 (on his survival, his wealth, eloquence and influence with Vespasian), *Dial.* 13 (on his pliable personality), *Hist.* 4.43; Suet. *Dom.* 3 (on his quick repartee); Dio 65.2.3 and Statius fr. *Bello Germanico* (seeing his speech as 'Nestorei'). On Nestor's speech as 'sweet' and influential, Chapter 4.
- 52 Acilius Glabrio, consul in AD 54, proconsul of Asia in 65–66, *curator aquarum* 74–79. His son was executed, underlining the precarious position of a senator under Domitian. Another old man in Juvenal's *consilium*, Veiento (*Sat.* 4.113), was said to have had priestly responsibilities in old age. On priestly duties, see also below. On the career details of Juvenal's characters, Griffith 1969: 140–142.
- 53 Pliny *Ep.* 2.1, cf. 6.10, 9.19.1, *Pan.* 60.5; also Tac. *Hist.* 1.8–9, 1.77, 2.49, 2.51, 2.68; *ILS* 24. On his career: *RE* 27; Sherwin-White 1966: 143.
- 54 Tac. *Hist.* 2.51.48. He may have been offered the principate before, after he defeated Vindex, Tac. *Hist.* 1.8–8; Dio 63.25; Plut. *Galba* 10.
- 55 On Spurinna (see also p. 109); Arrius Antoninus was suffect consul in AD 69, proconsul of Asia under Vespasian and consul in AD 97, at which time he must have

- been in advanced old age; Frontinus (who was seen by Pliny, together with Corellius, as the two most distinguished men of his day, [*Ep.* 5.1]) was praetor in AD 70, *curator aquarum* in AD 97 (under Nerva) and had a third consulship in AD 100 (under Trajan; see *Aq.* 2.102). He died in 103/4; Corellius Rufus, Pliny *Ep.* 1.12. Also Hadrian, who was said to have only appointed mature or older men as tribunes in order to give to the authority of tribuneship ‘the full measure of prudence and maturity’ (*SHA* 10).
- 56 Dio, 67.14.5, who calls him Gaius Valens.
- 57 Tac. *Ann.* 13.30.4. For his inscription, see *AE* (1972) 7.174 (as pointed out by Crook 1955: 354).
- 58 It seems, however, that men who were already old could not be appointed as decurions: *Dig.* (Callistratus) 50.2.11.
- 59 On Epaphroditus, see Minois: 1989: 88; *RE* 4. In ancient sources: *ILS* 9505; Tac. *Ann.* 15.55.72; Suet. *Ner.* 49 (without a mention to age), *Dom.* 14 (on his execution).
- 60 The first emperor to retire was Diocletian; born in the early 240s AD, he abdicated in 305 because of ill-health. On the notion that Diocletian’s retirement was not entirely voluntary, but forced upon him by Galerius, see Balsdon 1969: 171.
- 61 Sen. *Brev. Vit.* 3.5.
- 62 Dio 56.28.2–3.
- 63 Crook 1955: 39; Levick 1976: 217, 225. On Tiberius’ last years, Suet. *Tib.* 24.2; Tac. *Ann.* 4.41, 4.57ff.
- 64 Sen. *Brev. Vit.* 3.5.
- 65 On these names, Talbert 1984: 153 (also the emperors Balbinus and Pupienus, about whom less is known). On Pertinax, *SHA* 12.1.
- 66 *SHA* (*Sev. Alex.*) 16.
- 67 Val. Max. 8.13.3, 8.13.1 (resp.). On priestly duties in old age, Sen. *Ag.* 176, *Oed.* 554, 595, 667.
- 68 Cic. *Leg.* 1.10; *De Or.* 1.42.190 (on Lucius Crassus proposal to become a jurisconsult in old age); *Brutus* 95.326; Quint. 12.11.4.
- 69 Cic. *Sen.* 9.28.
- 70 On this speech: Cic. *Brut.* 22.89; Livy, 39.40.7–12. The directness of Cato’s speech is well contested in the ancient sources, e.g. *De Sumptu Suo* (c. 164 BC) Gell. NA 3.24.1; *Pro Rhodiensibus* Gell. NA 6.3 (Malcovati *ORF* 64–66, frgs 162–19); *Contra Servium Galbam pro direptis Lusitanis*, Gell. NA 13.25.15, cf. Livy 39.40.12; Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 15 (who mistakenly saw Cato as aged 90); Val. Max. 8.7.1.
- 71 Cic. *Sen.* 9.28–29; Quint. *Inst.* 12.11.2, 12.11.5–6; Val. Max. 8.7.4 (on Livius Drusus); Pliny *Ep.* 2.3 (on Isaeus).
- 72 Pliny, for example, had many protégés, e.g. *Ep.* 4.15, 8.23 (Asinius Bassus), 6.23 (Cremutius Ruso), 6.26 (Fuscus Salinator), 8.23. The teaching of children was a different matter; this job was often allocated to an elder slave (Wiedemann 1989: 144, 1996: 291).
- 73 On this, Cole and Gadow 1986: 32ff.
- 74 Quint. *Inst.* 12.11.5.
- 75 For example, Pliny *Ep.* 3.1 (on Spurinna; for details of the alleged survival of four of Spurinna’s poem, *RE*, col. 1797), *Ep.* 4.3 (on Arrius Antonius).
- 76 On Cicero’s names: Sen. 5.13, 7.22–23, 14.50. Similarly: Plut. *An Seni* 785–b (Greek examples only), and Jer. *Ep.* 52.3; Val. Max. 8.7, ext. 13 and 8.13, ext. 2.
- 77 For some of these names I am indebted to De Luce 1989: 210–211.
- 78 Sen. *Brev. Vit.* 20.3, who saw, however, Turannius as someone whose desire for labour outlasted his ability.

- 79 Some exceptions do exist; there is, for instance, no retirement age for members of the House of Lords or for those in the judicial services. But in most western societies the age of 65 (sometimes less for women) is arbitrarily chosen as the age one has to withdraw from productive labour. The theory of retirement as a period of disengagement was first developed by Cumming and Henry 1961; cf. Cole and Gadow 1986: 33; Holmes 1983: ch. 5. For the legal aspects of retiring, Griffith et al. 1990: 1ff.
- 80 Griffith et al. 1990: 1. See also a survey by A. Hunt (*The Elderly at Home*, HMSO) which reveals that over 90 per cent of employed people enjoyed working.
- 81 Holmes 1983: 52.
- 82 On ageism, Butler 1975: 11–12; Bytheway 1995.
- 83 Pliny *Ep.* 4.23.3.
- 84 Pliny *Ep.* 4.23.4; trans. B. Radice. It is of note that Pliny never made retirement, he died aged about 53.
- 85 Sen. *Ep.* 36.2. Seneca was probably around 67–69 at the time of writing; Lucilius may have been a few years younger. Seneca retired from public life at the age of 66, or thereabouts, for which permission from the emperor was needed.
- 86 Sen. *Ep.* 19.1, cf. *Brev. Vit.* 13.1ff. On retirement also *Ep.* 8.1ff., 10.1ff., 19.6ff., 22.1ff., 36, 56.1ff.; 68, 94.69ff.
- 87 Sen. *Ep.* 8.1; cf. Cic. *Sen.* 18.65.
- 88 Cic. *Fam.* 7.33, 9.1; Plut. *Cic.* 40.
- 89 On these names, Sen. 14.49–50.
- 90 Aur. *Med.* 3.14 (his choice of intended reading matter included ‘Deeds of Ancient Rome and Greece’ or extracts of these).
- 91 Seneca, too, was said to scorn ambition, e.g. *Ep.* 68.2.
- 92 Pliny is another example of someone who said to look forward to retirement in order to read and add to his store of knowledge, see *Ep.* 4.23.
- 93 On the warning not to leave the study of philosophy too late, e.g. Sen. *Ep.* 8.3; Musonius fr. 17.
- 94 Epicurus *Ep ad Menoecus* 3.122 (fr. 17 *Sent. Vat.*). On old age as a good time for the study of philosophy, e.g. Cic. *Sen.* 2.4; Sen. *Ep.* 76 and 82, *Brev. Vit.* 14.1.
- 95 Plato *Rep.* 498b–c; Sen., esp. *Ep.* 68.13ff. Some saw middle age as the ideal age to give up wordly ambition and concentrate on the study of philosophy, e.g. Horace, *Epist.* 1.1.10–12, who declared in his mid-forties that he was getting too old for the writing of lyric verses and should turn his thoughts to the study of philosophy.
- 96 For example, Richardson [1933] 1969: 131–162 and Zanker 1995.
- 97 Zanker 1995: 10.
- 98 On this, Zanker 1995: 205. On Cicero: Cic. *Brut.* 24 (on his admiration for Plato, *ad Att.* 4.16.3), *Att.* 4.10.1 (on Atticus); Lucian, *Nigr.* 2.
- 99 Zanker 1995, esp. ch. 5.
- 100 Jer. *Ep.* 52.3.80–85.
- 101 On Spurinna’s career, Tac. *Germ.* 33; Pliny *Ep.* 2.7.2. Also R. Syme 1958 *Tacitus*, vol. 2, Oxford, 634–635.
- 102 Pliny *Ep.* 3.1.4–8
- 103 On study and learning in old age, e.g. Solon Bergk. II 18(10); Plato *Rep.* 7.536d; Pliny *Ep.* 4.23; Sen. *Ep.* 8.1ff., 36.4, the whole of letter 68, 76.4; Val. Max 8.7 (who saw study and diligence as a consolation and guidance as how one should deal with old age); Lucian *Macr.* 18.
- 104 On Socrates: Plato *Men.* 235e, *Euthydemus* 272c; Cic. *Sen.* 8.26; Val. Max. 8.7, ext. 8. On Cato: [Victor] *De Vir. Ill.* 47, who said that Cato learned the Greek

- language from Ennius (see Powell 1988: 103); Cic. *Acad.* pr.2.5, *Sen.* 1.3, 8.26; Nepos *Cato* 3.2; Val. Max. 8.7.1; Quint. *Inst.* 12.11.23; Jer. *Ep.* 52.3.95.
- 105 Quint. *Inst.* 12.11.23; cf. Jer. *Ep.* 52.3.95; Cic. *Sen.* 8.26; Val. Max. 8.7.1.
- 106 On Cato's dismissiveness of Greek culture (seen as corruptive), Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 22.1–5, 23.1–3; Polybius 31.12.5a. On Cato's Greek studies, Gruen 1993: 53–83; Astin 1978: 157–181.
- 107 Sen. *Ep.* 36.4ff.
- 108 Seneca, already retired and about 67–69 at the time of writing, wrote that he had joined the school of Metronax, and Marcus Aurelius was said to have joined the philosopher Sextus the Boeotian at a mature age (probably his fifties). On their defence: Sen. *Ep.* 76.1–2. On Marcus Aurelius, see Philostratus (from a saying of Lucius) *VS* 2.1.557. On old age as a time for learning, cf. Sen. *Ep.* 8.1, 36.4. On the pleasure of adding to knowledge in old age, cf. Solon Bergk. II 18(10); Plato *Rep.* 7.536d; Val. Max. 8.7.14; Lucian *Macr.* 18; Pliny *Ep.* 4.23.
- 109 Hor. *Sat.* 1.10.21; Lucian *Hermotimus* 13.1; Cic. *ad Fam.* 9.20.2; cf. Aul. Gell. 11.7.3 (late-learners often make stupid mistakes), 15.30.1 (late-learners behaved in a ridiculous fashion); Sen. *Controv.* 1 pr.4.
- 110 Cic. *Sen.* 6.17.
- 111 Plut. *An Seni* 785e; cf. Sen. *Ep.* 55.3–4, sarcastically remarking that his contemporary Vatia, a praetorian millionaire, had died already.
- 112 Lucullus had retired from public duties, disillusioned with politics, after the Mithridatic wars; at first he still gave advice to statesmen, but he retired altogether after his friend Cicero was banished and Cato was sent to Cyprus. On criticism of Lucullus, esp. Plut. *Luc.* 28.3–4, *Cat. Mai.* 24.
- 113 Hor. *Epist.* 1.14.33–34.
- 114 Serv. *Aen.* 6.114.
- 115 Val. Max. 8.13 (*De Senectute*), 8.7 (*De Studio et Industria*).

6 SEXUALITY

- 1 Plato *Rep.* 329b–c; Cic. *Sen.* 12.39–40; Plut. *An Seni* 786a, 788e; Sen. *Ep.* 12.5–6. In the Christian texts: Ambr. *Cain* 1.3.11 PL 14.321; Aug. *Serm.* 138; Jer. *Ep.* 52.3; J. Chrysost. *Ep. ad Hebr.* 7.7ff.; Justinian *Apol.* 15.6. In the more popular sources: Hor. *Epist.* 2.2.55–57, *Od.* 2.11.6; *Anth. Pal.* 11.29–30, 12.40, 14.321; Juvenal 10.240ff.; Luc. *Tyrannicide* 4; Verg. *Georg.* 2.484. See also the examples below.
- 2 Galen, according to Oribasius *Med. Coll.* III, p. 110 Daremberg. Others saw sex as harmful at all times, Arist. *HA* 7.582a23ff. (sex would shorten life expectancy, as seed was a moist residue which could not be replaced); Sor. *Gyn* 1.30 ('all excretion of seed is harmful, in females as in males'). On this, Rousselle 1988: 12–14. Women were not usually considered in this context, as sex for them was only socially permissible for reasons of procreation.
- 3 [Ps] Plut. *De Liberis Educandis* 20.14a–b.
- 4 The standard evidence for this is Cicero's argument in the *Pro Caelio* 11.28.
- 5 Cic. *De Off.* 1.34.123; cf. Sen. *Contr.* 2.6.4 (an old man who still indulges in drinking and debauchery is mad), 2.6.11; Quint. 2.4.9; J. Chrysost. *Ep. ad Hebr.* 7.7.
- 6 Cic. *Sen.* 12.42, 12.40 (if one gives in to lust, there is no room for self-control). See also Plato *Rep.* 328d; Sen. *De Vita Beata* 5.4 (sensual pleasures soften the mind), 7.3; Lact. *Inst.* 6.9.10; Jer. *Ep.* 52.3; Sil. Ital. 15.94–95; Macr. *Sat.* 2.8.10ff.; Is. of Seville *Etym.* 11.2.30.
- 7 Sen. *Ep.* 12.5–6 Also: Plato, *Rep.* 329b–c; Cic. *Sen.* 12.39 (with some

- reservations), 14.49 (without reservation); *Sen.* 14.49 ('But how blessed it is for the soul, after having, as it were, finished its campaigns of lust and ambition . . . and of all the passions, to return within itself, and, as the saying is, "to live apart"'); Musonius fr. 17.30; Plut. *An Seni* 786a, 788e; Favorinus (second century AD) in Stob. 4.50a23; Juncus in Stob. 4.50b.85, p. 104 W.-H.; Diog. of Oenoanda (second century AD Epicurean) fr. 149 Sm.; Philostr. *Vit. Apoll.* 1.13; cf. Is. of Seville *Etym.* 11.2.30; Aug. *Serm.* 138; J. Chrysost. *Ep. ad Hebr.* 7.9, *ad Isaiab* 3 ('old age frees us from desires of the flesh and the old no longer enjoy physical pleasure'); Jer. *Ep.* 52.3; Justinian *Apol.* 15.6; Clement Al. *Paed.* 3.1.3.
- 8 As related by Plato *Rep.* 329b–c. See also Amm. Marc. 25.4.2, who tells us that the reputedly chaste emperor Julian drew inspiration from the anecdote.
- 9 Plato *Rep.* 328d; Cic. *Sen.* 14.47–49; *Sen. Ep.* 68.13–14 (old age is the perfect time for study as the time for 'boiling and foaming' is now past); Plut. *An Seni* 785a–b, 786a, 788e; Jer. *Ep.* 52.3; Is. of Seville *Etym.* 11.2.30.
- 10 Christian writings showed a close association between sexuality and original sin: it was the fall of Adam and Eve into mortality which had made sexual acts necessary if the human race was to survive; see Brown 1989: 399ff.
- 11 Rousselle 1988, esp. ch. 8.
- 12 For example, Aug. *On Marriage and Concupiscence* (Augustine saw sexual intercourse as secondary to friendship in marriage); J. Chrysost. *Hom.* 19 on 1 Corinthians 7 (a married man was less likely to give in to sexual temptation outside marriage); Clem. Al. *Strom.* 3.12.82.3. See also Rousselle 1988: 129–197 and Brown 1989: 69 (who saw a gradual waning of married sexual activity, leading to an abstinence in widowhood and old age).
- 13 Augustine, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. XXII, p. 258. See also Brown [1988]1989 and Minois 1989: 123–128.
- 14 J. Chrysost. *Ep. ad Hebr.* 7.7.
- 15 Aug. *Sermon* 161; cf. *Contra Julianum* 3.30.22: 713. On this: Minois 1989: 123.
- 16 Nonius p. 74.15 M fr. from D. Laberius.
- 17 Cic. *Sen.* 3.7, 5.15, 12.39, 14.47–48 (with reservations).
- 18 Aug. *Sermon* 138; cf. *Confessions* 10.30.41–42. On Augustine's struggle with his sexuality: Brown [1988]1989: 387–427; Minois 1989: 126. On 'amorous sleep' Rousselle 1988: 66.
- 19 Cic. *Sen.* 12.39ff.
- 20 Hor. *Epist.* 2.2.55–57, 1.1.10–12, 2.214; *Ode* 4.1 (written in his fifties, Horace suggests he is too old for love); Propertius 3.5.23–25 (old age is the time when one has to look for more serious pastimes). See also a range of epigrams on the theme 'enjoy yourself when you can, you will soon be past your prime', e.g. *Anth. Pal.* 11.25, 51, 52, 53.
- 21 Max. *El.* 1.101–106.
- 22 *Anth. Pal.* 11.54; Tib. 1.8.29–30; cf. 1.8.50 (advice to a young girl to be nice to young lovers, but hard on the effete old); cf. Ov. *Amores*, e.g. 1.9, 1.13, 3.7.
- 23 Juv. 1.37–43, 6.36; trans. P. Green. See also Martial, who put 'getting it up for old women' (*arrigere ad vetulas*) among a list of scams beneath the dignity of a poor but proud man; cf. 7.75.1, 11.29 (see also [Chapter 7](#)). On captation, Champlin 1991: 87–102.
- 24 See esp. Pliny *Ep.* 2.20 (on Regulus).
- 25 Luc. *Dial. Mort.* 9; cf. *Dial. Mort.* 5, 6, 7. For a real-life example of the power of the 'rich, old, and childness', Tac. *Ann.* 13.52.
- 26 For other examples, see *Casina*, *Asinaria*, *Mercator*, *Stichus*, *Cistellaria*, *Bacchides*.
- 27 Plaut. *Merc.* 546–549.
- 28 *Ibid.* 639–640.

- 29 Segal 1987: 42.
- 30 Hor. *Epist.* 2.1. 107.
- 31 Plaut. *Merc.* 262ff., cf. 292, 303.
- 32 Ibid. 1015–1019.
- 33 Juv. *Sat.* 10.204–208, trans. P. Green; cf. Lucilius 331–332 ('That he is deformed, old, arthritic and gouty/crippled and wretched, thin, with a big rupture'). Also Maximianus, *El.* 2.41–42, 4.52 and 4.54 and elegy 5.
- 34 *Anth. Pal.* 11.30; trans. W. Moebius; cf. Ov. *Am.* 3.7.17–18. For the use of 'Venus' as a metonym for sexual intercourse, see Williams 1999: 329 n. 24 and Adams 1982: 57 (on 'Venus' as referring to the penis).
- 35 On the use of 'vir', Treggiari 1991: 7; Williams 1999: 163ff.
- 36 Veyne 1978: 50.
- 37 Martial 4.50.2 ('Why do you keep calling me an old man Thais? Nobody is an old man, Thais, when it comes to giving suck').
- 38 Williams 1999: 163.
- 39 On marriage, especially Treggiari 1991.
- 40 Treggiari 1991: 8. Under the Augustan marriage laws, children born outside a lawful marriage had no right to legacy or succession.
- 41 Plut. *Conj. Praec.* 138ff.; similarly [ps] Quint. *Decl. Min.* 286.10.
- 42 Sen. *De Matrimonio* (= fr. 13 Haase 1872) 84–85 (men should not make love too ardently to their wives), also quoted by Jerome (*Adv. Iovin.* 1.49 = 318D, 319A); Lucr. *De Rer. Nat.* 4.1280–1287; Plut. *Conj. Praec.* 139.9. Married women were generally not supposed to show passion in their love-making – from Soranus *Gyn.* 1.34.: 'women are usually married for the sake of children and succession and not for mere enjoyment'.
- 43 Musonius 12 'On sexual indulgence' = Lutz 84.9, 87.9.
- 44 Gell. *NA* 4.3.2; Suet. *Caesar* 52.3.
- 45 On the *Lex Papia Poppaea*, see Ulpian fr. 16.1.3–4 (in a passage concerning inheritance between spouses), *Dig.* 5.4.27. Justinian, *Apol.* 1.15.6, implied that he saw the age of 60–70 as the time sexual passions would end. In the medical/scientific texts: Arist. *HA* 7.585b3–5 (between 40 and 50), *Pol.* 1335a9 (70 for men, 50 for women, but procreation is desirable when parents are in their prime); Soranus *Gyn.* 1.20.1 (on women: 50, but for some not until 60); Oribasius *Med. Collections* 142 (on women: 50, but earlier if overweight); Pliny *NH* (on women: 50 for some, 40 for the majority). On the menopause: Amundsen and Diers 1970: 79–86.
- 46 Seneca '*in libris moralis philosophiae*', fr. 119 Haase *ap Inst. Div.* 1.16.10, trans. Parkin 2001: 227; cf. Treggiari 1991: 66 n. 115.
- 47 Ulp. *Regulae, Pernicianum* 16.3 (see also Suet. *Div. Claud.* 23.1); Ulp. *Reg. Claudianum* 16.4. On this: Corbett 1979: 52–53; Talbert 1984, nos. 33 and 50 resp.; Treggiari 1991: 78; Suder 1995: 34–35; Parkin 2001: 223ff. See also p. 127 and n. 80 on the *senatus consultum Calvisianum*, penalising the marriage between a woman over 50 and a man under 60.
- 48 *Dig.* 24.1.60 (Hermogenian), 24.1.61 (Gaius), resp.
- 49 It was thought by some jurists that under the Julian and Papian laws a marriage between men over 60 and women over 50 was prohibited. Corbett, 1979: 53, suggested that this was an erroneous interpretation by later jurisprudence, pointing to the *Cod. Inst.* 5.4.27 ('marriages which take place between men and women who are more or less than 50 or 60 years of age, and are prohibited by the *lex Julia et Papia*, cannot be prevented in any way, or on either side, where the man consented').
- 50 Val. Max. 7.7.4.

- 51 Pliny *Ep.* 8.18.8.
- 52 De Beauvoir 1972: 84; [ps] Quint. *Declam. Min.* 306.20, cf. 376.2.
- 53 Plaut. *Most.* 702ff.; Aelian *De Natura Animalium* 7.17; Juv. *Sat.* 6.143–148. On Terentia's accusation, see also p. 132.
- 54 Archibald and Baikie 1998: 222; Pfeiffer 1976: 265 ('There is no doubt that a taboo against sex in old age exists and that it constitutes a serious impediment to systematic, in-depth investigations into patterns of sexual behaviour in old age').
- 55 Pfeiffer *et al.* 1968: 753–758.
- 56 Pfeiffer 1976: 265.
- 57 Even in the late 1980s, an anonymous author, writing in *The Lancet* (18 January 1986, p. 147), argued that an elderly man who still showed any signs of sexual interest is called 'dirty' and commented that 'the younger generation, so liberal, so free, so uninhibited by old-fashioned social conventions according to themselves, are often rigid, narrow, puritanical, and censorious when it comes to the behaviour of older citizens'. Also Gibson 1993: 104 (today's parents are challenging the prevailing stereotyping of no sex in old age, while children try to maintain the stereotype).
- 58 Archibald and Baikie 1998: 225.
- 59 Comfort 1990: 12.
- 60 Johnson Silny 1993: 124–146.
- 61 Saller 1987: 21–34; Hopkins 1964–65: 309–327. Legally, a girl could be married at the age of 12: *Dig.* 25.7.1.4.
- 62 On divorce: Corbier 1991: 127–144. On remarriages: Humbert 1972; Bradley, 1991: 162, who suggested that many men and women would experience at least two marriages.
- 63 Hemelrijk 1999: 263/264 n.31. On an anecdote relating to the difference in age between Cornelia and her husband Tiberius Gracchus, see Val. Max. 4.6.1; Plut. *TG* 1.2; Pliny *NH* 7.122; Cic. *Div.* 1.36.
- 64 Pliny *Ep.* 4.19.4.
- 65 Plut. *Praec. Con.* 48=Mor. 145C.
- 66 See also Treggiari 1991: 102 (who argued that the compatibility of ages in such marriages was not emphasised in the sources). For a criticism about sexual compatibility, see pp. 126–127.
- 67 On Masinissa, Plut. *An Seni* 791f (quoting Polybius), Val. Max. 8.13. ext. 1; Pliny *NH* 7.61; cf. Cato, who fathered a child when he was aged around 79 (see p. 129).
- 68 Arist. *Pol.* 1334b2.
- 69 Plut. *Pomp.* 55.
- 70 Plut. *Cic.* 4.1–3. Other reasons given by Plutarch for Cicero's divorce were debts and Terentia's alleged neglect of Cicero. It is of note that Plutarch made a special mention of the differences in ages between the two wives.
- 71 Plut. *Pomp.* 53.1–2 (trans. R. Warner), cf. 48.5 (Plutarch accused Pompey of neglecting affairs of state for her). Martial (11.104.17–18) used Julia's reputed passion for her husband irreverently, using her as an example in order to entice a wife to be more adventurous in her love-making.
- 72 On Cato: Plut. *Cat. Mai.* (comp.) 6.1–2; Gellius *NA* 13.20.8 (who saw Cato as 'multum senex' at his marriage). On Cicero: Plut. *Vit. Cic.* 41.2–3; Dio 46.18.3–4 (saw Cicero as in extreme old age at the time of his marriage. He wrote that Cicero married a mere girl, in order to pay off his debts). On Pompey and Cornelia: Plut. *Pomp.* 55.2. Cornelia too was said to have had an affectionate and passionate relationship with Pompey: Plut. *Pomp.* 74–75.
- 73 Bradley, 1991: 160–161, shows several examples.

- 74 Val. Max. 5.9.1. John Chrysostom, *Ep. ad Titum*, PG 62.693, referred to a case where a man loved his stepmother, and the woman her stepson, as a result she hanged herself.
- 75 Pliny *Ep.* 6.33.
- 76 Laswell 1973: 519.
- 77 [ps] Quint. *Decl. Min.* 306.18–19; Aelian, *De Nat. Animalium* 7.17.
- 78 Ter. *Phorm.* 422ff., 1010; *Ad.* 929–945; Plut. *An Seni* 788e–f.
- 79 Chaucer, *The Miller's Tale*, 3223–3226.
- 80 Ulp. *Reg.* 16.1.4 (*Calvisianum*). On this law: Talbert 1984 n. 144; Treggiari 1991: 78; Parkin 2001: 224.
- 81 Mart. 9.80; see also 3.93 (an attack on ageing women hoping to remarry); *Anth. Pal.* 11.425 (anon.); cf. 11.70 (Leonidas), 11.71 (Nicharchus), 11.202 (anon.); Apuleius, *Apol.* 89–91 (an old widow can only goad a young man into marriage if she has a large dowry).
- 82 Treggiari 1991: 262–319, esp. 301.
- 83 Jer. *Ep.* 77.3 ('The laws of the Caesars are different from the laws of Christ: Papian commands one thing, our Paul another. Among the Romans, men's unchastity goes unchecked; seduction and adultery are condemned, but free permission is given to lust to range the brothels and to have slave girls . . . With us what is unlawful for women is equally unlawful for men'); cf. Lact. *Inst.* 6.23–25; Ambr. *Abr.* 1.25; J. Chrysost. I *Thess.* 5.2 PG 62.425, II *Tim.* 3.3 PG 62.617; Aug. *Serm.* 82.11, 132.2–4. 153.5.6. See also Arjava 1996: 203–204; Nathan 2000: 97–102.
- 84 See e.g. Corbett 1979: 133–146; Csillag 1976; Raditsa 1980: 278–339.
- 85 For example, Plut. *Praec. Conj.* 16=1140b; Publilius Syrus *Sententiae* 445; [ps] Quint. *Decl. min.* 357.2; see also Val. Max. 6.7.1. Some moralists disagreed and believed both husband and wife should be faithful in marriage, e.g. Epictetus *Discourses* 2.4; Sen. *Ep.* 94.26; cf. *Dig.* 48.5.14.5.
- 86 Musonius 12; my italics.
- 87 Suet. *Div. Aug.* 71.1. On the seriousness of the offence of deflowering virgins, Treggiari 1991: 315.
- 88 Suet. *Tib.* 42.1–2.
- 89 Ibid. (who does, however, in this instance, not point out Tiberius' age).
- 90 On Tiberius' sex life, Suet. *Tib.* 42–45; Tac. *Ann.* 6.51.
- 91 Suet. *Tib.* 43.1. Tiberius' old age was mentioned in a number of (alleged) accusations, e.g. 'that filthy-mouthed, hairy, stinking old man', and from an Atellan farce 'The old goat goes / For he does / With his tongue'; Suet. *Tib.* 45.
- 92 Suet. *Div. Vesp.* 21; Balsdon 1962: 131.
- 93 *Script. Hist. Aug.* Marc. Aur. 29.10.
- 94 Aur. *Med.* 1.17.2. Concubinage was common, as argued by Rousselle 1988: 80–84, 96–100; Gardner 1986: 56–60; Arjava 1996: 205–210. It was not until late antiquity, probably under the influence of Christianity, that the simultaneous possession of a wife and concubine was legally disallowed: see Paul. *Sent.* 2.20.1.
- 95 Plut. *Cat. Mai* 424.1–6.
- 96 Ibid. 24.1 and comparison 6.1–2;
- 97 Ibid. 17.7; Plut. *Conj. Praec.* 13 (*Mor.* 139e).
- 98 Plut. *An Seni* 785f–786b; cf. *Vit. Luc.* 39.1. On Plutarch's criticism of Lucullus, see also [Chapters 2](#) and [5](#).
- 99 Musonius fr. 13A.
- 100 Against: Veyne 1978 (who saw ties of affection as weak in the Republic, gradually becoming more affectionate under the Empire); Hallett 1984: 222–242 (argued against an emotionally fulfilling relationship within a marriage). For: Dixon 1991: 99–113, 1992: 69–70, 83–90 (saw, from the Republic onwards,

- evidence of sentimental feelings between husband and wife); Saller and Shaw 1984: 134–139 (saw signs of affection in the Republic – denied by Veyne – and the Empire, and argued that, as there is no evidence on this subject in the early sources, it is useless to speculate). See also Treggiari 1991: 229–261 (on conjugal love).
- 101 *Fam.* 14.1–4. Similarly, in the fictional sources, Ov. *Tristia* 3.3.15–20, 24; 4.23–24, (who, when in exile, expressed the regret not to be able to grow old in his wife's embrace); Pliny *Ep.* 4.19.5 (expressing the expectation that his wife Calpurnia would still love him in old age, when his body would be old and decrepit); Sen. *Ep.* 104.1–5 (on his love for his much younger wife Paulina and the effort he made to please her); Statius *Silvae* 3.5.22–36, esp. line 24 (on his long-lasting love for his wife, from youth into old age). For inscriptional evidence, see n. 102.
- 102 For example, *CIL* 6.35536, 5662, 9810, 27853. For other examples: Lattimore 1962 (esp. 277–279 nn. 107, 108); Treggiari 1991: 245 n. 129; Dixon 1992: 70 and n. 118. On references to long marriages: *CIL* 5.1880, 11.4483, 13.2000, 3.14524 (see Treggiari 1991: 234) and *CE* 1563 (Rome), on a marriage lasting for 60 years (see Lattimore 1962: 278).
- 103 Pliny *Ep.* 8.5.
- 104 Pliny *Ep.* 3.16.6 and 3.16.10. The desire to follow a husband into suicide can be found elsewhere: Pliny *Ep.* 6.24 (on a unknown wife who followed her husband into suicide); Tac. *Ann.* 16.34.2 (on Arria minor, who was dissuaded); Tac. *Ann.* 15.64 (on Seneca's wife Paulina, averted on Nero's command); Plut. *Pomp.* 74 (on Pompey's wife Cornelia's intention to commit suicide after the death of her first husband Publius). See also Val. Max. 4.6.2–3, on examples of husbands who committed suicide on the death of their wives.
- 105 *CIL* 6.1527.44–45, 51–66 (see e.g. Dixon 1992: 85), the so-called *Laudatio Turiae*. See also *CE* 111, an inscription bearing a 60-line poem, hailing the virtues of a wife, Pantheia (Lattimore 1962: 277).
- 106 Prop. 4.11.85–90 (on remarriage), 91–96. For the ideal of the *coniunx perpetua* (a dead wife remains a wife for ever), see *CIL* 6.19008 = *CE* 1571 (as pointed out by Treggiari 1991: 246).
- 107 Lucr. 4.1280–1287; Plut. *Praec. Conj.* 138.4. The concept that love grows over time can also be found in contemporary poetry, as, for example, in one of MacLeish's poems: 'Ours is the late wisdom of the afternoon./We know that love, like light, grows dearer toward the dark' (*New and Collected Poems*, 1976).
- 108 Dio 56.3.3 (on this, also [Chapter 4](#)); Suet. *Aug.* 99.1.
- 109 Dio 56.42; Ov. *Fasti* 6.637–640.
- 110 Pliny *Ep.* 8.18.10; my italics.
- 111 Sen. *Ep.* 104.3 ff.
- 112 Plut. *Cic.* 41.2–3; cf. Dio 46.18.3–4 (who also criticised Cicero's divorce of Terentia, putting particular emphasis on her role as wife and mother).
- 113 Ov. *Met.* 8.618–724.
- 114 For example, *CIL* 6.12652, 6.18817, 6.20569, 6.24427. See also *CIL* 8.7156 = *CE* 512, on an old man (who claimed to have lived to 100), who is said to have delighted in life until the death of his wife Valeria, after which he no longer found any joy in living. Another desire was to be buried together in one grave (symbolic for the marriage bed), e.g. Apul. *Met.* 8.14; cf. Val. Max. 4.6.3 (on a husband who committed suicide when his wife died, the two bodies were cremated together and buried in one grave); *CIL* 6.19008 = *CE* 1009. On this, Treggiari 1991: 246.
- 115 Juv. 10.240–245.

7 ABUSE OF OLD WOMEN

- 1 Dig. 50.16.46.1.
- 2 Horace, *Sat.* 1.2.83–103, differentiated between the prostitute and the *matrona*; the latter kept her body well hidden and was not for chasing, the former flaunted her wares.
- 3 Many exemplars of ideal womanhood can be found: e.g. Lucretia (esp. Livy 1.58), Verginia (Livy 3.44), Cornelia (mother of the Gracchi), Julius Caesar's mother Aurelia, Augustus' wife Livia (known for her chastity, e.g. Val. Max. 6.1.pr.); these women were admired and idealised in later literature. Counterparts – women who were said to have indulged in sexual licentiousness – were abhorred and criticised, e.g. Clodia (sister of the notorious Clodius Pulcher), Claudius' wife Messalina, Nero's wife Poppaea Sabina.
- 4 Modesty for women was thought to go back to the law of Romulus: Dion. of Halic. 2.25.1–6.
- 5 J. Chrysost. *Ep. ad Titus* 3.2–5. Drunkenness was seen as a particular vice of old women, as will be discussed on pp. 145–147.
- 6 For example, Cat. 61.156–59, 109.6; Prop. 1.8.46, 2.15.36, 2.25.9–10, 3.10.18; Tib. 1.6.85–86, 2.2.19–20.
- 7 Prop. 2.15.21; cf. Hor. *Od.* 1.25, 2.4.22ff., 2.11.5ff., 4.13; *Anth. Pal.* (Meleager) 5.112 (there is a time of life when love is appropriate, and a time when it is not); 5.20 (Honestus); cf. Martial's stance that after a certain age love-making was no longer seemly, esp. 3.93. See also Curran, 1978: 213–241, who brings to attention that out of over fifty rape scenes in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, most victims were in their extreme youth.
- 8 Hor. *Epod.* 8.12ff.
- 9 *Anth. Pal.* (Agathias) 5.273; cf. *Anth. Pal.* (anon.) 11.417; Propertius 4.5.59–60. The idea that an old woman is sexually repulsive appears to be innate in western culture. In the twentieth century Sontag, 1972: 37, wrote: 'the double standard about aging converts the life of women into an inexorable march toward a condition in which they are not just unattractive, but disgusting . . . Aging in women is a process of becoming obscene sexually, for the flabby bosom, wrinkled neck, spotted hands, thinning white hair, waistless torso, and veined legs of an old woman are felt to be obscene'; a description not dissimilar to Horace's depiction of the old woman, e.g. *Epod.* 8 and 12.
- 10 On her intellectual skills and accomplishments, depicted as part of her erotic attraction, Hemelrijk 1999: 79–81.
- 11 Hallett 1973, esp. 103–104.
- 12 Prop. 4.5 (n. 13); Tibullus 1.6.81ff., 1.8.41–48; cf. Ov. *Am.* 1.8.51–54; *Anth. Pal.* 5.76, 5.92, 5.103 (Rufinus), 5.23 (Kallimachos), 5.233 (Macedonius), 5.298 (Julianus), 11.36 (Phillippus).
- 13 Prop. 3.25.11–16.
- 14 Hor. *Od.* 1.25, 3.15, 4.13. For a stylistic comparisons, Esler 1989: 172–182.
- 15 Hor. *Od.* 1.25.9–20; trans. D. West.
- 16 On old courtesans, cf. *Anth. Pal.* 5.21 (Rufinus), 5.271 (Macedonius), 5.273 (Agathias).
- 17 Cf. Hor. *Od.* 3.6.29–32 (where, this time more explicitly, a husband is acting as a pimp for his wife). On the subject of female bodies as an economic resource within the family network, Flemming 1999: 38–61, esp. 42.
- 18 Hor. *Od.* 3.15.13–16. On a similar theme, Mart. *Ep.* 10.90, who advised an old woman to stop plucking her pubic hair and suggested, tongue-in-cheek, that this would be a right thing to do for Hector's wife, but not for his mother.
- 19 Hor. *Od.* 4.13.14–16.

- 20 Hor. 3.14.25–26. Odes 1.25 and 3.15 were published in 23 BC, when he was 42, but were probably written in the decade before.
- 21 *Anth. Pal.* 6.210. As proposed in [Chapter 6](#), the age of 50 (reputedly the age of the menopause) was commonly seen as the age when sexual intercourse was thought to be inappropriate and women were no longer seen as sexually attractive.
- 22 Lucilius 334–335; trans. A. Richlin; cf. Ter. *Heaut. Tim* 389–391 ('It is our beauty that attract lovers, when that is faded, they switch off their inclinations, and, if we have made no provisions in the meantime, we live in neglect').
- 23 On Cynthia's skills in poetry, writing and witty conversation, Prop. 1.2.27–30, 2.3.21–22. On her depiction as a *docta puella*, Prop. 1.7.11, 2.11.6, 2.13.11.
- 24 Abu-Laban and McIrvin 1979: 570.
- 25 Plut. *Conj. Praec.* 141.22.
- 26 On this, see also [Chapter 8](#).
- 27 Cosmetics were considered unnatural and deceptive, e.g. Galen (*De Compositione Meicamentorum Secundum Locos*, Kühn, 12.434–5, as pointed out by Wyke 1994: 150 n. 63). Sen., *De Consolatione* 16, on his pleasure with the modesty of his mother, who reputedly wore no make-up, jewellery or flimsy dresses (the use of cosmetics had moral significance and was associated with wantonness and extravagance). That even elderly *matronae* did care about their outward appearance can be learned from a third century AD relief, found in Neumagen-an-der-Mosel (*CIL* 13.4185), which shows an elderly woman in Roman dress whose scanty hair is being dressed by a maid and two other attendants.
- 28 Plaut. *Most.* 277–278.
- 29 For example, Tib. 1.8.45–46; Mart. 3.42; Lucian *A Prof. of Public Speaking* 24, *Dial. Meret.* 11; Hor. *Epod.* 12.10–11; Cat. 8.14; *Anth. Pal.* 11.68, 11.69, 11.310 (Lucilius), 11.408 (Lucian), 11.66 (Antiphilus), 11.67 (Myrinus), 11.374 (Macedonius).
- 30 Mart. 9.37.1–5.
- 31 *Anth. Pal.* 11.408 (Lucian); cf. 11.66 (Antiphilus).
- 32 *Anth. Pal.* 11.67.
- 33 Juv. *Sat.* 6.191–199, trans. Hemelrijk.
- 34 Ausonius *Ep.* 65; Luc. *Dial. Meret.* 11.309; cf. *Anth. Pal.* 6.210. See also n. 2 above.
- 35 For example, *Pr.* 57.3–5 (a tomb), *Pr.* 12.1–4 (Sibyl's sister); *Anth. Pal.* 5.103 and 11.67 (Hecuba), 11.69 (a crow; on the extremely long life of the crow, Pliny *NH* 7.48.153), *Anth. Pal.* 11.72.2 (Nestor), 11.69 (Rhea); Mart. 3.32, 3.93, 9.29, 10.67.1–4, 10.90 (Hecuba).
- 36 Carson 1990: 137–145, esp. 139.
- 37 Hor. *Epod.* 8 (cow), *Epod.* 12 (black elephants, crocodiles); Mart., in 3.93, covered a whole gamut of ancient, ugly and sexually disgusting symbols (grasshoppers, ants, crocodiles, frogs, gnats, owls, she-goats, a duck's bottom). On the word 'wolf' as a term of abuse (for prostitutes or madness and lack of self-control), see Adams 1983: 333–335; Myers 1996: 6 n. 39, 7.
- 38 Hor. *Epod.* 8.1–10; trans. D. West.
- 39 Hor. *Epod.* 12.1–13; trans. D. West.
- 40 Hor. *Epod.* 12, 8–9, 14–16. An ugly old woman could cause a virile young man's impotence; female youth and beauty, on the other hand, could inspire virility (even the flagging virility of old age): Ov. *Am.* 3.7.41–44.
- 41 Hor. *Epod.* 12.14–26; trans. D. West.
- 42 On the lion as strong and beautiful, e.g. Petronius 44.4 and 14; also [Chapter 1](#). The woman presents the wolf as fierce and powerful, but the image is

- problematic. More traditionally, the word *lupus* was used as a term of abuse, see n. 37 above.
- 43 Lucian *A Prof. of Public Speaking* 24; cf. *Carmina Priapea* 57. On captation (and further examples) see also [Chapter 6](#); Champlin 1991: 87–102; Richlin [1983]1992: 114.
 - 44 Fraenkel 1963: 59, n. 163.
 - 45 Fr. 117 D; cf. 188W=100 (the so-called Cologne fr.).
 - 46 *Anth. Pal.* 5.204, 11.328; cf. *Vir. Appendix* 83.37 ('as soon as your errant head [the penis] is plunged in her noisy muck'; trans. A. Richlin). On the symbolism of wetness, see p. 140.
 - 47 Mart. 3.32, 3.93, 7.75, 10.67, 10.90, 11.21; *Virg. App.* 83. 26–37; *Carm. Pr.* 12 and 57; *Petr. Sat.* 134–138. On this subject, see esp. Richlin [1983]1992: 109ff.; 1984: 67–80.
 - 48 Lucilius 279–281, but conceded this was too extreme in 306–307. On the seriousness of castration (which would mean the loss of masculinity), e.g. Mart. 11.75. See also *Anth. Pal.* 11.65 (Parmenion) who said that hunger (as in a famine) is to be preferred to sex with an old woman.
 - 49 *Anth. Pal.* 5.304; trans. D. Fitts; cf. *Anth. Pal.* 5.258 (Paulus Silentiarius); *Aus. Ep.* 34 (on a former love, Galla, now grown old).
 - 50 *Anth. Pal.* 5.13; cf. 5.282 (Agathias); *Maxim. El.* 2.1.25–34 (on an old woman who still looked stunning).
 - 51 Sontag 1972: 36.
 - 52 Cic. *De Or.* 2.236, cf. 2.239, 2.266; cf. Arist. *Poetics* 5.1449a ('the laughable is a part of the ugly'). On ugliness (and disability) as a source of humour: Garland 1995.
 - 53 Ugly young prostitutes were also subjected to invective: Richlin 1984: 77.
 - 54 Richlin [1983]1992: 11–31.
 - 55 Mart. 1.35, 11.15.3 resp.; cf. 3.68, 11.16; on *apologiae* also Cat. 16 (the poet must be chaste, but not his poetry).
 - 56 See Richlin [1983]1992: 10, 64ff. For descriptions of the sexual activities during Roman festivals, e.g. *Ov. Fasti* 3.531–534 (the feast of Anna Perenna, when even old people were, tipsily, seen to make love); *Sen. Ep.* 97.8 (on the Floralia).
 - 57 Legman 1975: 481, 767. On aggressive humour in contemporary society (including ageing women), Palmore 1971: 181–186.
 - 58 At least in the more popular, humoristic sources; in the moralistic texts, the old man in love was treated more seriously, especially if combined with a debauched lifestyle (as argued in [Chapter 6](#)).
 - 59 Mart. 3.93.1–5 (trans. W.G. Shepherd); *Hor. Ode* 1.25.
 - 60 Sontag, 1972: 29–38 argued that this double standard still applies today.
 - 61 *Ov. Ars Am.* 1.281–282 ('In us, desire is weaker and not so frantic'), 1.341–342; *Prop.* 3.19.15–16 (on Myrrha, who had incestuous feelings for her aged father); see also figures like Medea, Scylla and Clytemnestra.
 - 62 On '*vagina dentata*' in Roman literature, Richlin 1984: 72–74, [1983]1992: 116. In modern psychology, Horney 1932: 348–360; Legman 1975: 369–381; Walker 1985: 17.
 - 63 Pliny *Ep.* 5.3.2.
 - 64 Mart. 3.68, 3.86, 11.16.9–10; cf. *Priap.* 8; *Ov. Ars Am.* 1.31–34 (probably tongue-in-cheek, advised matrons to stay away from his verses).
 - 65 Hemelrijk 1999: 51–52.
 - 66 *Ov. Ars Am.* 3.765.
 - 67 From a speech of Cato reported by Aul. Gell. *NA* 10.23.1–5; see also Dion. of Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.25.6 (drink encouraged adultery). Val. Max (6.3.9) reported on a

man who beat his wife for being drunk, an act for which he was not criticised; cf. Pliny *NH* 14.14.89.

- 68 Lucil. fr. 831–832W=766–767M; cf. Apul. *Metam.* 6.22, 9.29; see also Otto 1962: 28. Among the many examples of drunken old women in Roman literature: Phaedrus 3.1; Plaut. *Curc.* 96–109, *Cist.* 120–121, 149, *Aul.* 354–356; Ter. *Andr.* 231; Prop. 4.5.1–2, 4.5.75–76; Hor. *Od.* 3.15, 4.13.2–6; Ov. *Am.* 1.8.3–4, *Fasti* 2.571–582, 3.542, 3.765–766; Petr. *Sat.* 134–138; Lucian *Dial. Meretr.* 4, 8; *Anth. Pal.* 6.291 (Antipater), 7.329 (anon.), 7.353 and 7.423 (Antipater), 7.455 (Leonidas), 7.456 (Dioscorides), 7.457 (Ariston). On the *annus ebria* (mainly in Greek literature): Musso 1968; Bremmer 1987: 201–202; Henderson 1987: 119–120.
- 69 The great thirst of the old woman for large quantities of wine is reflected by a pun on her name: e.g. Plaut. *Curc.* 96ff. (Leaena, named after a festival associated with Dionysus); Canthara, a wide drinking vessel, in Plaut. *Epid.* and Ter. *Andr.* and *Ad.*; Scapha, a drinking vessel, in Plaut. *Most.*; Staphylia, a grape, Plaut. *Aul.*; Astaphium, a dried grape, Plaut. *Truc.*; Bromia, a name Dionysus was known by, Plaut. *Amphitr.*; Lesbia, wine from Lesbos, Ter. *Andr.*; Oenothea, a wine-goddess, Petr. *Sat.*; Dipsas, thirst, Ov. *Am.* 1.8; Cinara, a thorny plant which induced thirst, Hor. *Od.* 4.1, 4.13 and *Epist.* 1.7.28. On these names: Salomonson 1980: 95–96 n. 161; Myers 1996: 7–8.
- 70 *Anth. Pal.* 7.353 (Antipater); cf. 7.455 (Leonidas) on another drunken Maronis, who wasted away the family fortune.
- 71 Plaut. *Curc.* 96–100; cf. Phaedrus 3.1 (on an old woman who could sniff out wine).
- 72 Hor. *Od.* 2.19, 3.25.
- 73 See e.g. Lucr. *De Rer. Nat.* 3.4456 (too much wine makes the intellect totter); Hor. *Od.* 1.18.14–17 (wine leads to self-love and vainglory); Ov. *Rem.* 805 (too much wine dulls the spirit); Sen. *De Ir.* 2.19.5 (wine kindles anger); Plut. *Mor.* 8, *Table-talk* 3.3.650 (drunkenness causes irascible temper, forgetfulness and a wandering mind, cf. Macrobian *Sat.* 7.6.9–11); Clem. Al. *Paid.* 2.2 (wine leads to silliness, lack of wisdom, anger, irritation, excesses, idleness, debauchery).
- 74 Hor. *Od.* 4.13.4 (on Lyce), 1.18.4–7 (in the context of poverty and soldiering).
- 75 Simpson *et al.* 1994: 575–587.
- 76 For example, Plaut. *Aul.* 691, 806–807, 815, *Cist.* 41, *Truc.* 902–904; Ter. *Eun.* 912–917, *Phorm.* 728–765, *Andr.* 231; Tib. 1.3.83–85, 1.5.47–56, 2.6.44–54; Prop. 4.5; Ov. *Am.* 1.8, *Met.* 10.382ff., 14.689ff.; *Anth. Pal.* 5.106, 5.262, 5.289, 5.294. On the *lena*, esp. Myers 1996: 1–21.
- 77 Prop. 4.5.
- 78 Ov. *Am.* 1.8.1–4, 1.8.113–114. Myers 1996: 7.
- 79 Acanthis and Dipsas – and other witch figures – will be discussed further on pp. 149–151.
- 80 These sculptures are copies of third or second century BC Hellenistic originals, or first century BC representations of devotees of Dionysus (on the latter, esp. Sande 1995: 30–49). See also Salomonson 1980; Zanker 1989; Fowler 1989: 71–74.
- 81 See Liv. 39.8.5ff.; cf. Lucian (*Dion.* 1).
- 82 Ov. *Fast.* 3.764.
- 83 Sande 1995: 44; Zanker 1989.
- 84 Sen. *Ep.* 95.20.1. See also Juv. *Sat.* 6.300ff., 6.425–433 (Bona Dea); Macr. *Sat.* 2.5.2 (on Julia).
- 85 Rosivach 1994: 114; cf. Bremmer 1987: 201–202.
- 86 On Lyce, see p. 138. See also Ov. *Fasti* 3.765–766 (women in old age are especially addicted to wine).

- 87 Simpson *et al.*, 1994: 575–587.
- 88 Tib. 1.8.17–26; Hor. *Sat.* 1.8, *Epod.* 5 and 17; Ov. *Am.* 1.8; Prop. 3.6.25ff., 4.5; Apul. *Met.* 1.13ff., 2.20, 2.30, 9.29; Petr. *Sat.* 63.8, 134–138. On magic scenes also Verg. *Ecl.* 8.64–69, *Aen.* 4.478–521; Ov. *Her.* 6.83–94; Juv. *Sat.* 6.630ff.; Lucian *Dial. Meret.* 1(281), 3(286), 4(288); Lucilius 1028–1029W. On witches in Roman literature: Bremmer 1987: 204–206; Oliensis 1991; Wallinger 1994.
- 89 Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.8.18, 2.29.73 (in the context of a dig to the Stoics' presentation of Providence in the guise of an old hag); Sen. *De Matrimonio*, fr. 52 Haase; Plut. (*Mor.* 145c, 407c), argued that only the uneducated and women believed in magic.
- 90 Ov. *Ars Am.* 2.329–330 (an *anus* purifies a bedchamber with the use of sulphur and egg), *Fast.* 2.571ff.; Tib. 1.5.12 (an *anus* using sulphur, to heal Delia).
- 91 Lucan, *Bell. Civ.* 6.419–506. On the Sibyl of Cumae, *Aen.* 3.441–457, 5.735; Ov. *Met.* 14.104–153; Petr. *Sat.* 48.8.
- 92 Young, beautiful, and usually sexually alluring witches can also be found, as, for example, Circe and Medea.
- 93 Hor. *Epod.* 5.14–15, 5.27–28 (on the witch Sagana); Ov. *Am.* 1.8.15–16.
- 94 For example, Hor. *Sat.* 1.8.20; Prop. 4.5.5ff.; Hor. *Epod.* 17; Luc. *Dial. Meret.* 4.1.4–5.
- 95 Tib. 1.5.52 (*strix violenta*); Prop. 4.5.17; Ov. *Am.* 8.13–14.
- 96 Ov. *Am.* 1.8.9–12; Prop. 4.5.13; cf. Hor. *Epod.* 5.45–46.
- 97 Ov. *Am.* 1.8.13–14; Prop. 4.5.14. In Apul. *Met.* 3.24–26, Lucius is changed into an ass with the help of a witch.
- 98 Prop. 4.5.19; Ov. *Am.* 1.8.13; Hor. *Sat.* 1.8.
- 99 Cic. *In Vatinius* 6.14; Hor. *Epod.* 5.37–38; Ov. *Am.* 1.8.17–18 (on necromancy); Apul. *Met.* 2.21.
- 100 Verg. *Aen.* 474–521 (witches free hearts from love or bring about love pains); *Ecl.* 8. On witches as a threat to the male's erotic power, e.g. Tib. 1.5.41, 1.12.9–10; Ov. *Am.* 3.7.35, 3.7.79–80; Petr. *Sat.* 134–138 (old crones try to bring back Encolpius' sexual potency in order to satisfy their own sexual desires).
- 101 Hor. *Epist.* 2.2.209 (on fear of witches, ghosts, magic and marvels). Children were frightened by their nurses by tales of a witch-like figure: Plut. *Mor.* 1040b.
- 102 Hor. *Sat.* 1.8, *Epod.* 5 and 17 (Canidia was also mentioned in *Sat.* 2.1 and 2.8, *Epod.* 3.7).
- 103 On farting as a theme in modern humour, see Legman 1975: 979, 991.
- 104 Canidia's amorousness: cf. *Sat.* 1.8, *Epod.* 17.
- 105 She was accompanied by dogs, which in the ancient world had associations with erotic female desires and powers; see Oliensis 1991: 111ff.; Myers 1996: 6. On the witches' squalidness, Hor. *Epod.* 5.98; cf. *Sat.* 1.8.24; Prop. 4.5.69, 72.
- 106 Oliensis 1991: 110, 120; cf. Sagana, whose name has also an etymological connection with old age: Cic. *Div.* 1.31.65 (*anus sagae*). On her appearance: Hor. *Epod.* 5.47–48.
- 107 Henderson 1987.
- 108 As also argued by Manning 1970: 394ff. See also Hahn, 1939: 215, for the argument that the character of Canidia might be based on a real person and Fraenkel, 1963: 62–64, for a refutation.
- 109 For example, Plut. *Luc.* 43 (Lucullus was said to have lost his mind through drugs administered by one of his freedmen); Livy 8.18.6ff. (on alleged poisonings by Roman matrons); Cic. *Pro Cael.* 13.30ff., *In Vatinius* 6.14 (accusing the Pythagorean Societies – and Vatinius – of being engaged in 'unknown and mysterious rites'); Amm. Marc. 29.2.26, on a 'simple old woman' (*anum*)

- simplicem*), who was put to death for alleged witchcraft; Juv. 6.610–630; Suet. *Gaius* 50 (Caesonia was reputed to have given him an aphrodisiac which drove him mad), *Claud.* 44, *Nero* 33–34.
- 110 Tac. *Ann.* 2.69; cf. Suet. *Gaius* 3. On the belief in incantations, Sen. *Nat. Quest.* 4.7. See also *CIL* VI 3.19747 on 4-year-old Iucundus, who was allegedly killed by a witch.
- 111 On abortions Juv. 6.595–597; Ov. *Am.* 2.14.27–28, *Fasti* 1.18.621–624.
- 112 *Dig.* (Marcianus, *Inst.* 14) 48.8.3.1.
- 113 *Dig.* 48.8.1–9. For prosecutions see *Amm. Marc.* 19.12 and 26.3 (it is of note that both of the accused were male), 29.2.26 (n. 108 above).
- 114 *Dig.* 48.19.38.5 (Paul).
- 115 C. Th. II, 36.1 (314 or 315); 9.9.29.
- 116 The witch was cursed in Prop. 4.5.75–78; Ov. *Am.* 113–114; Hor. *Epod.* 87–102.
- 117 Widdowson 1973: 200–220.
- 118 See Laslett, 1989: 135, who argued that women over 50 were two and a half times more likely to be accused of witchcraft than they should have been. Trial pamphlets from sixteenth-century witch hunts in England showed that the majority of the accused were old: see Hester 1992: 193ff. For fear of ugly old women in medieval times: Shahar 1997: 50.
- 119 Siegel 1990: 81–89.

8 FAMILY

- 1 Saller 1991: 146–151 and 1994, ch. 5. Other kin, too, from grandparents to aunts and uncles, came under the umbrella of *pietas*.
- 2 Much has been written on paternal power in modern scholarship, especially from the legal point of view, e.g. Schultz 1951; Buckland 1966; Crook 1967; Daube 1969; Watson 1974; Harris 1986; Lacey 1986; Veyne 1987: esp. 17–18, 29; Gardner 1993 (esp. ch. 3) and 1998. See also Saller 1994; Arjava 1998: 147–165 (on late antiquity). From the time of Augustus, property acquired through military service was excepted from *patria potestas*.
- 3 Garnsey and Saller 1987: 47–48 and n. 7; Gardner 1993: 78.
- 4 Daube 1969: esp. 75–76; Veyne 1987: esp. 16–17, 18, 29–30; cf. Hopkins 1983: 244–245. On parricide, Thomas 1981: 643–713; cf. Gardner 1993: 65, who argued that actual cases of parricide are not easy to find in the sources.
- 5 Gardner, 1998: 2; cf. Crook 1967: 114, 122 ('the legal character of *patria potestas* stands out in sociologically misleading quality'); Saller 1994, chs 5 and 6.
- 6 As upper-class men commonly married at the age of 30 (Saller 1987: 21–34), the father of a middle-aged man would almost certainly be a *senex*.
- 7 Pliny *Ep.* 9.12; cf. Ov. *Fasti* 2.625; Sen. *Ben.* 5.17.4. On the relationship between fathers and their mainly adolescent sons, Eyben 1991, 1993.
- 8 Saller 1994: 9–69, 121. See also Parkin 1992b: 70–85.
- 9 Hopkins 1983: 244; cf. Daube 1969: 83, who argued that 'not too much' should be made of the *peculium* as a mitigating factor of the father's power. On the *peculium*, also *Dig.* 4.4.3.4 (Ulpian); 34.4.31.3 (Scaevola).
- 10 See also. Saller, 1994: 124–125, who points out that sons in Cicero's and Pliny's letters do not appear as helpless supplicants requesting funds for each expenditure, as one might expect from the legal rules.
- 11 Cic. *Att.* 14.16.4.
- 12 Ibid. *Att.* 12.7.1, 12.32.2 show Cicero to have been a generous and indulgent father.

- 13 Kaser 1938: 85–86, as pointed out by Saller 1994: 124; Gardner 1993: 78.
- 14 Cic. *Rosc. Am.* 39, 42–44.
- 15 Garnsey and Saller 1987: 140.
- 16 The jurist Paul (*Dig.* 15.1.46) indicated that it was common practice for a father to give a general blanket authorisation of administration to cover all necessary operations with the *peculium*. Only in Early Rome, a child in *potestate* could not bind him/herself by contracts, but in classical law this rule was only in force for the *filiafamilias*. On this, see Gardner 1986: 9, 1993: 57–62; Saller 1988: 397 n. 20, 1994: 123.
- 17 Gardner 1998: 7 shows that some scholars therefore saw emancipation as a punishment for unruly sons.
- 18 *Dig.* 31.87.4 (Paul), 32.37.3 (Scaevola), 34.4.23 (Papinian).
- 19 See Arjava 1996: 43, 73 (in late antiquity).
- 20 In theory only the father could perform transactions with other citizens. Ways were found round this. Remedies were provided by praetorian jurisdiction so a son could cope independently in some legal matters, as, for example, *actio in factum*, which was used to ‘assist or to supplement or correct the civil law, for the public utility’ (*Dig.* 1.1.7 [Papinian]); the jurist Paul gives a list of praetorian actions which were said to be available to a son in his own name (*Dig.* 44.7.9); on this Gardner 1993: 74–78.
- 21 The father’s right to revoke a *peculium* was emphasised by Daube 1969: 76, 83 (not giving any evidence on how often and in which circumstances a *peculium* was revoked).
- 22 Sen. *De Clem.* 1.14.1; Cic. *Rosc. Am.* 19.53. See also Crook 1967: 120; Champlin 1991: 15 (‘disinheritance out of anger is rarely recorded’). On the *peculium*, also *Dig.* 4.4.3.4 (Ulpian); 34.4.31.3 (Scaevola).
- 23 Gardner 1986: 183–190, 1993: 64; Saller 1994: 164, 167.
- 24 Sen. *De Clem.* 1.14.2, cf. Dion. Hal. 20.13.3 (‘it was believed in Rome that a father should not be unduly harsh or lenient in the training of his children’); Sen. *Controversiae* 2.3.2: ‘I had a father of sound mind, not so stern as to be cruel, not so indulgent as to be foolish.’
- 25 Sen. *De Clem.* 1.15.1.
- 26 On the private *consilium*, Lacey 1986: 137–139.
- 27 *Dig.* 37.12.5 (Papinian).
- 28 See e.g. Val. Max., who has chapters on strict fathers (5.8) (it is of note that severe punishment was deemed necessary mostly because of a son’s offence against the state), indulgent fathers (5.7) and fathers who behaved with moderation (5.9) (even if their children’s behaviour was suspect). See also chapter 5.4 on *pietas* (where reciprocal respect for fathers and sons is shown).
- 29 This was a common topos in Roman literary writings, from the first century BC onwards, see e.g. Livy pr. 34.4; Pliny *Ep.* 2.14, 8.14.4–6, 8.23; Val. Max. 6.2; and esp. Gellius, *NA* 2.15.1–2.2.3.
- 30 Cic. *Sen.* 11.37; cf. Val. Max. 8.13.5. On Appius Claudius’ age and blindness, see also Chapter 5.
- 31 The virtue of *pietas* will be considered further below.
- 32 Cic. *Att.* 12.7.1, 14.16.4; cf. *De Inventione* 1.48 (‘There is no one, who does not wish his children to be safe and happy’). See also *Rep.* 1.43.67, where Cicero stated that a father may not chastise a son for fear of being disliked.
- 33 Cic. *Cael.* 33–34 (once again, naming Appius Claudius as the example of an old-fashioned stern disciplinarian).
- 34 On a change of manners over time, see e.g. Veyne 1978: 36 (who noted a change of manners under the Empire); Dixon 1991: 99–113 (from the late Republic);

- also Eyben 1991: esp. 115, 143; Saller 1994: 113, who acknowledged the possibility of a change of manners over time, but argued this would be difficult to prove because of a scarcity of contemporary evidence of the time before Cicero.
- 35 *Dig.* 48.9.5 (Marcian); cf. Publilius Syrus (c. first century BC), *Sententiae* 515 ('an angry father is most cruel to himself').
- 36 Arjava 1998: 147–165.
- 37 The level of authority is reflected in the means of punishment: corporal punishment for a boy or adolescent; verbal or other chastisement for the more mature (see Saller 1991: 144–165; Eyben 1991: 117ff.).
- 38 See also Kleijwegt 1991, esp. 67ff., who – with the exception of the late Republic – agreed to the absence of generation conflict, and suggests (wrongly in my view) that this may be because of the dominant trend in ancient society to view youngsters as adults.
- 39 Saller 1986: 18. See also Dixon (1997: 153–161), whose paper on conflict in the Roman family noted political power struggles, squabbles over inheritance and wills as the major source of conflict between father and son, but who did not emphasise arguments over daily money concerns.
- 40 *Dig.* 39.6.5, 39.6.2–5; *C. Th.* 8.12.1; cf. *Dig.* 39.6.19, 39.6.23 (on gifts *causa mortis* to a son still in power).
- 41 *Dig.* 27.10.4.
- 42 *Cic. Att.* 12.28.1. A mother could finance a son's senatorial career, contribute to his *peculium* and was expected to contribute to a daughter's dowry.
- 43 If married *sine manu*, a woman would be *sui iuris* on the death of her father and could then own property in her own right. On the mother's ability to use her own wealth, Gardner 1986: esp. 166; Dixon 1988: ch. 3, cf. 7 and 8; Arjava 1996: 99 (for late antiquity). A widow could also inherit her husband's estate on the understanding that she passed it on to their children on her death, although some widows only received a maintenance allowance.
- 44 Public opinion gave children equal rights, e.g. *Val. Max.* 7.8.2 (criticism of a mother who only remembered one of her two daughters in her will).
- 45 See also Coriolanus, who allegedly abandoned a traitorous march on Rome at the head of an enemy force after his mother Volumnia demanded that he desist (*Livy* 2.40; *Val. Max.* 5.2.1; *Plut. Cor.* 1.2, 4.3–4, 34–36; *Appian Roman History* 2.5). Her stand was admired (*Plut. Cor.* 37).
- 46 *Cic. Att.* 5.4.1, 6.1.10, 6.6.1, *Fam.* 8.6.2.
- 47 *Plut. Pomp.* 9; cf. *Cic. Clu.* 12–14 (on Sassia, who was said to have forced her daughter to divorce her husband so she could marry him herself, as she had passionately fallen in love with him. She matched up her daughter with her stepson from her second marriage.)
- 48 *Tac. Dial.* 28.6; *Plut. Ti. Gracch.* 1.2 and *C. Gracch.* 19; *Val. Max.* 4.4. On her status of *univira*: *Prop.* 4.11.
- 49 *Plut. Ti. Gracch.* 8.5, *C. Gracch.* 4.2.
- 50 *Nepos fr.* 1.1–2.
- 51 On the authenticity of Cornelia's letter: Bauman 1992: 228; Hemelrijk 1999: 193–197.
- 52 Cornelia was probably born in the late 190s; the letter would have been written in 123 BC. For Cornelia's biographical details, Hemelrijk 1999: 263 n. 31.
- 53 Another example of a son who defied his mother in adulthood would be Brutus, who resisted Servilia when she opposed his marriage to Porcia (see Africa 1978: 599–626).
- 54 *Plut. C. Gracch.* 13.1–2 (who wrote that, according to some, Cornelia helped Gaius in his later political career, while others said she was against him).

- 55 Ibid. 19.1–3.
- 56 On this statue: Pliny *NH* 34.14.31; Plut. *C. Gracch.* 4.3.
- 57 See Hallett 1984: 243–256; Africa 1978: 599–626; Dixon 1988: 175, 179ff. Seneca criticised mothers who sought power through their sons (*Helv.* 14.2–3ff.).
- 58 Tac. *Ann.* 1.5.5–6; Dio 57.12.3. On Livia's relationship with Tiberius, Levick 1976: 153, 275 n. 98.
- 59 Dio 57.12.2–3. Suet. *Tib.* 50, believed that Livia's ambition only stretched to co-rulership of the Empire.
- 60 Dio 57.12.
- 61 Suet. *Tib.* 50–51.
- 62 Ibid. 50–51.1–2; Dio 57.12.6.
- 63 Tac. *Ann.* 4.57; cf. Dio 57.12.6..
- 64 Tac. *Ann.* 5.1–2.
- 65 Suet. *Tib.* 50.2–51.2.
- 66 Plut. *Caes.* 5. Other examples of funeral orations for elderly women include Julia, grandmother of Octavius, who received a funeral *laudatio* from her 12-year-old grandson (Suet. *Aug.* 8.1; Quint. 12.6.1); Caecilia, a nonagenarian, from her son Atticus, aged about 67 at the time, who is said never to have needed to apologise to his mother (Nepos, *Atticus* 17).
- 67 Suet. *Claud.* 3; Tac. *Ann.* 4.22 (on Urgulania).
- 68 Apuleius *Met.* 4.28–6.24, esp. 6.9ff.
- 69 Dixon 1988: 223–224.
- 70 On the reciprocity of *pietas*: [Cic.] *ad Herennium* 2.13.19 ('There is a natural law, observed *cognationis aut pietatis causa*, by which parents are esteemed by children and children by parents'). On respect for parents, e.g. Cic. *Off.* 1.34.122; Gellius *NA* 2.2, 5.13 (on the rules of courtesy and duties between fathers and sons); Dion. Hal. 20.13.3 (children should not be disobedient to their aged parents). On reverence for the aged in general cf. Cic. *Sen.* 18.63–64, *Inv.* 1.48; Val. Max. 2.1.9; Max. *El.* 2.60ff. Among Christian authors, e.g. J. Chrysost. *Ep. ad Tim.* 13.2. In modern scholarship, esp. Saller 1988: 393–410, 1994, ch. 5.
- 71 For example, *Anth. Pal.* 7.466 (Leonidas), 7.647 (Simonides), 16.131 (Antipater); Cic. *Pro Rege Deiotaro* 2; Verg. *Aen.* 12.43; [ps] Quint. *Decl. Maires* 10.2. Also Pliny *NH* 33.47.137; Sen. *De Ira* 3.16.3–4; Plut. *Mor.* 263a–b (on Pythes, who reputedly pleaded with Xerxes to let him keep one son at home to look after him in old age); Lucian, *Tyrannicide* 1, who depicted a father who killed himself when he discovered the dead body of his son. On this, also Parkin 1997: 125 n. 6.
- 72 Cic. *Cael.* 32.79–80, cf. [Cic.] *ad Her.* 4.39.51 and Sen. *Her. Fur.* 1249.
- 73 Sen. *Ep.* 78.1–2.
- 74 Val. Max. 2.1.9. On Antoninus Pius *SHA* (Hadrian) 24.3–5 4; *Ant. Pius* 2.6 (adding that a man who would not do this would be considered undutiful).
- 75 Verg. *Aen.* 3.709 (Aeneas said his father was 'the comfort in all my anxieties and misfortunes'). See also Appian, *Bel. Civ.* 4.6.41, about another son who carried his old father out of danger on his shoulder.
- 76 On mother and son relationships, esp. Dixon 1988: ch. 7.
- 77 Plut. *Conj. Praec.* 36 (*Mor.* 143c).
- 78 Sen. *ad Marc.* 19.2; cf. 3.4 (on visitations to mothers). On similar laments in literature, Verg. *Aen.* 9.481, 11.160, 12.57–58; cf. Tac. *Ann.* 6.10.1 (on a widowed mother's lament on her son's death). On the vulnerability of widows, e.g. Val. Max. 7.3.5.
- 79 Sen. *ad Marc.* 16.6–8. Elderly fathers too could benefit from their sons' status, if the sons had come to pre-eminence (Sen. *Ben.* 3.31–32).
- 80 Sen. *ad Helviam* 15.1 (as an adolescent, he declined to go abroad on military

- service because he was loth to leave his mother: 24.1). On visitations to mothers, cf. Cic. *Att.* 13.42 (on Quintus) and 12.28.1 (on Marcus); Aur. *Med.* 1.2.6, 6.12 (who described his visits to his mother as pleasurable and the visits to his stepmother as duty visits). Sons who did not visit their mothers in old age were criticised, e.g. Suet. *Tib.* 51.2.
- 81 On this, see Hallett 1984: 251ff.
- 82 Suet. *Vesp.* 1.3.2.2; Aus. *Parentalia* 5. On grandmothers as educators, Sen. *Helv.* 18.7–8; Pliny *Ep.* 7.24; Sen. *Ep.* 94.9; Quint. *Inst.* 6 pr.8; *CIL* 6.1478, 13.2056 (on a grandmother who did not remarry so she could devote her time to her five grandchildren).
- 83 Cic. *In Verrum* 2.1.112.
- 84 For Cicero's pleasure in Tullia, e.g. Cic. *Q Fr.* 1.3.3; *Att.* 11.17, 12.1 (where the approximately 58-year-old Cicero said he looked forward to Tullia's embraces, who must have been close to 30 at the time), 17.1. On his desire to indulge her 2.8, 4.4a, 4.16. On Cicero's grief at Tullia's death and his intention to build a shrine, *Fam.* 4.6, *Att.* 12.23, 12.28 and 12.12, 12.19, 12.37 resp. See also Plut., *Cic.* 41, who suggested that Cicero divorced his newly wed second wife Publilia because she seemed to be pleased at Tullia's death.
- 85 Dio 46.18.6. See also Treggiari 2002: 69.
- 86 Val. Max. 5.4.6. See also Antistia Pollitta (Tac. *Ann.* 16.10.3–11), who committed suicide when her pleas to Nero to save her father failed; Livy 3.47.1ff. (on Verginia); Tac. *Ann.* 16.30.3–32 (on Servilia, who was sentenced to death when she tried to help her condemned, aged father).
- 87 See Balsdon 1962: 203 (on the lack of hard evidence on mother/daughter relationships). On mother and daughter relationships in general, Phillips 1978: 69–80; Dixon 1988: ch. 8; Hallett 1984: 259–262.
- 88 Pliny *Ep.* 3.11, 7.19 (on the Vestal Virgin Junia), 9.11 (on the relationship between Arria and Fannia); cf. Tac. *Ann.* 16.34.2.
- 89 Pliny *Ep.* 4.19.1, 8.11; *Ep.* 10.120 (on Calpurnia's journey from Bithynia).
- 90 On grandmothers as educators, see n. 82.
- 91 Hallett 1984: 261; cf. Dixon 1988: 217.
- 92 Sen. *ad Marciam* 16.6–8 (on the expectation that a daughter was expected to visit her mother on a regular basis). Cic. *Att.* 1.5.8; Aul. Gell. *NA* 12.1; Vell. Pat. 2.100.5
- 93 Val. Max. 5.4.7; Pliny *NH* 7.121. Both Valerius Maximus and Pliny feature a mother who was fed by her daughter. However, later texts – Festus' *de Verborum Significatione* 228L (second century AD) and Solinus' *Collectanea Rerum Memorabilium* (third century AD) – said it was a father, rather than a mother, who was fed by a daughter. As was pointed out to me by Parkin, an earlier Hellenistic story existed depicting a lactating daughter feeding an imprisoned father (*LIMC* 7.1.327–329; *CIL* 4.6635; Val. Max. 5.4.ext.1). Perhaps the story (as related by Val. Max. and Pliny) was changed in order not to offend Roman sensibilities, but this does not account for the change in the later Roman versions of the story.
- 94 For example, Harlow and Laurence 2002: 134.
- 95 Dio 56.3.
- 96 Cat. 68.119ff.; Pliny *Ep.* 8.10.
- 97 Vell. Pat. 2.100.5; cf. Dio 55.10.14.
- 98 Levy 1989: 264 (based on a Californian relative responsibility programme which was subsequently abandoned).
- 99 See Bolkestein [1939]1979: 299, 296; cf. Sachers 1951; Parkin 1997: 125–139.
- 100 *OCD*: 352.
- 101 Cic. *Att.* 176.2; cf. Musonius 15.10–15.

- 102 *Cod. Iust.* 5.25.1; cf. *Dig.* (Ulpian) 25.3.5.16 (it is natural for a parent to be supported by his son, but the son need not pay his debts). The Athenian law was attributed to Solon (Diog. Laert. 1.55). On this law in rhetorical exercises: Sen. *Contr.* 1.1, 1.7; Quint. 5.10.97, 7.1.55, 7.6.5.
- 103 *Dig.* 25.3.5.pr.2, 25.3.5.7; *Cod. Iust.* 25.2–3, 8.46.5.
- 104 *Dig.* 25.3.5.1, 25.3.5.13. On maintenance of emancipated children, see Gardner 1998: 74–85.
- 105 Gardner 1998: 77.
- 106 Obligation was based on justice and affection between blood relations (*Dig.* Ulpian 25.3.5.2). A son's heir could also be compelled to take over a son's filial duty, if he were alive, but only if the father was extremely poor (*Dig.* 25.3.5.17). On freedmen (a reciprocal obligation): *Dig.* 25.5.3.18–26, 25.3.6.pr., 38.2.33.
- 107 *Dig.* 25.3.5.2.
- 108 CIL 6.18086.3–8 (see Dixon 1992: 236 n. 90); cf. CIL 6.12307, 6.26901, 6.7578. On this, esp. Wiedemann 1989: 40–44; cf. Lattimore 1942: 187–191; Hopkins 1983: 219; Dixon 1988: 148; Parkin 1992a (ch. 8). On examples from the literary sources, see above (under emotional care).
- 109 Bradley 1991: ch. 5, esp. p. 117. See also Plut. *Mor.* 8E, 497, who advocated education for the poor.
- 110 *Cod. Theod.* 14.18.1; cf. *Cod. Iust.* 11.25.26. See also Parkin 1997: 138 n. 54. On begging, Wiedemann 1996: 279–281.
- 111 Bonfield 1989: 37–53.
- 112 *Dig.* 30.122.pr.
- 113 Hands 1968: 74. See also Cato *Dist. Cat.* 24, no. 39; Cic. *Off.* 2.15.54 (Give to those who are 'worthy' (*idonei*)); Sen. *Vit. Beat.* 23–24.
- 114 Pliny *Ep.* 6.2; *Dig.* 34.1. Also Sen. *Ep.* 12.3. See also Cato's remark that one should sell aged slaves (*De Agr.* 2.7), and Plutarch's disgust of this attitude (*Cat. Mai.* 5.2). Public slaves too could remain working at low status jobs (working in the public baths, cleaning streets and sewers: Plin. *Ep.* 10.31–32). On the treatment of aged slaves, also Suet. *Claud.* 25.2; Dio 60 (61).29.7 and Wiedemann 1996: 275–293.
- 115 Tert. *Apol.* 39.5–6. Hands 1968: 74–75 (bishops told who contributed and the name of benefactors were publicised or inscribed on church walls).
- 116 Aug. *Enarr. in Psalmos* 25.ii.18; as pointed out by Nathan 2000: 125.
- 117 *Cod. Iust.* 1.2.22–23, 1.3.45.3, 3a. See also Bolkestein 1976[1939]: 476.
- 118 Verg. *Aen.* 6.275–276; Juncus, in Stobaeus, *Florilegium* 50.2.85.
- 119 Cic. *Sen.* 3.8 (with some reservations).
- 120 *Anth. Pal.* 7.336 (anon.); cf. Diog. *ap* Diog. Laert. 6.51 (Diogenes the Cynic, on being asked what was the most miserable thing in life, reputedly replied 'an old man who is destitute'). For other, mostly Greek examples, Parkin 1997: 137 n. 53.
- 121 As pointed out by Parkin; see also Parkin 1992b.
- 122 Cic. *Planc.* 29.
- 123 Cic. *Off.* 1.58 ('the first bond is between husband and wife, the second between parents and children').

CONCLUSION

- 1 Comfort 1990: 12; cf. Borwinick 1984: 160; Kaiser and Chandler 1988: 698.
- 2 Resp. Cic. *Sen.* 23.85; Sen. *Ep.* 26.3.

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